

Spiritual Motherhood: Gendered Interpretations of the Spanish Laity's Religious Authority (1580–1730)

By
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Acceptance Page

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Abstract

This research project delves into the question of the role of women in cities and towns across Spain and its empire in the early modern period. It focuses on women who gained prominence as visionaries and thus became targets of inquisitorial scrutiny, because Inquisition documents are the traditional source base for historians to reach these otherwise (typically) voiceless individuals and communities. The field has traditionally argued that the power, number, and presence of these visionary women slowly declined throughout the early modern period owing to the pressures of the Counter-Reformation. Catholic reformers at the Council of Trent (1545–1563) specifically identified female lay and religious visionaries—who had grown rampant after Catherine of Siena became a famous visionary and religious leader in the fourteenth century—as threats to the Catholic canon. Historians have argued that the Counter-Reformation succeeded in breaking the power of these women, marginalizing them, and placing them under male church authority. I disagree. My research has discovered that these women visionaries continued to exist even in the late seventeenth and early to mid-eighteenth centuries throughout the Iberian Catholic world, and that they held religious power and authority through adaptation, not surrender.

My research focuses on four women from 1580 to 1730, two from Spain and two from Peru. In examining their lives, their actions, their communities, and their inquisitorial trials, I analyze the means and methods these women used to foster their authority, and the language they employed to explain their growing roles and responsibilities within their communities. I compare the women's own interpretations of their lives and actions to those of the community, studying the language that supporters and detractors used to proclaim or undermine the visionaries' authority. These women, their supporters, and their detractors explained their actions through the

language of a “spiritual family.” These women, and those around them, viewed their positions as teachers, advisers, and leaders as an extension of their roles as women: wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters. Centrally, the role of mother has proven the most potent explanation, as the role of a teacher, nurturer, and adviser in the home was extended to the broader spiritual family of the Catholic Church in the immediate and broader communities over which these women came to preside. This research demonstrates that the women of Spain and its empire were a significantly larger force than has previously been supposed. These “spiritual mothers” were cornerstones of the religious lives of those around them. They actively shaped their fellow men and women in their faith and understanding of religion and did so with the approval of many male members of the Catholic Church.

Acknowledgments

To all of those who have made this project possible, thank you. Motherhood has always meant more than blood or gender; it has always meant compassion. When one person cares for another, there are many ways to describe that relationship, but I believe the most potent to be *mother*. The relationship of child to mother is one of the most significant, complicated, and enduring relationships most people have throughout their lifetimes. This dissertation has used this foundational image of the caring and nurturing mother to expand on how motherhood can be ascribed and interpreted in the broader society, history, and culture of the early modern world.

This recalls Marta Vicente's favored metaphor for any major project, dissertation, or book: she likens this whole process to that of strained, prolonged, and complicated pregnancy, with advisers, committee members, and friends acting as the support network that midwives a new project. This metaphor has seemed most apt. To that end, the majority of the credit must go to Luis Corteguera, my adviser throughout this process. He has remained patient and understanding with all the setbacks and struggles that have been involved in generating this dissertation. For all the hours, meetings, revisions, and advice, thank you, Luis.

Next, credit and acknowledgment must go to the rest of my committee. Each of them has brought their expertise and skill to making this dissertation possible. Chris Forth has provided his valuable insights on the issues of religion, gender, the family, and its broader context and manifestations throughout early modern Europe. In addition, he has also enabled me to live and work in Lawrence by helping provide employment with both the Department of History and the *Cultural History* journal. Thank you, Chris. Both Santa Arias and Robert Schwaller have done their best to educate me in the many issues of race, intellectual discourse, and the unique

perspectives of Latin American culture and history. They have included me in various intellectual pursuits and gatherings, especially those at The Hall Center for the Humanities as well as other social events. Thank you both. Last, but certainly not least, Marta Vicente has been a tremendous support, introducing me to the complex issues and opportunities that make up gender history. She has worked with Luis and me on several occasions to enhance my understanding of the nuanced issues of social and gender relationships in the early modern Spanish Empire. Thank you, Marta, for all you have done.

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Table of Contents:

Title Page

<u>Acceptance Page:</u>	ii
<u>Abstract</u>	iii
<u>Acknowledgements</u>	v
<u>Table of Contents</u>	viii
<u>Introduction</u>	1
<u>Chapter 1</u> Defining Spiritual Motherhood: Luisa Melgarejo de Soto and Early Modern Catholic Femininity	6
<u>Chapter 2</u> Shifting Landscapes of Spiritual Motherhood: Catalina Ballester in the Communal Eye	46
<u>Chapter 3</u> Spiritual Motherhood as Path to Racial Whitening: María Jacinta Montoya	92
<u>Chapter 4</u> Spiritual Motherhood and the Essential Masculine Guide: Catalina de Vargas	129
<u>Conclusion</u>	188
<u>Bibliography</u>	196

Introduction

Historians of Spain and its empire in the early modern period have asked increasingly complex questions about women's position and power within Catholic societies and have also increasingly included other European nations and cultures in the analysis. Many questions have been raised, but they largely fall into three categories: what defined a "good woman" (how she was perceived or constructed in the mind and culture physically and socially), what women did (how they performed in society and were able to hold a variety of positions and roles), and what being a woman meant (how the concept of womanhood and the feminine can be and how the concept of womanhood was ascribed to women and (then) transposed to other areas and transposed into other areas such as the landscape, the community, and innumerable objects).

My research examines the cities, towns, and neighborhoods of the Spanish laity of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to investigate how women interpreted the restrictive system of Catholic society and acted within it. Historians have struggled to access the laity of early modern Spain and its empire because the voices of the laity are faint, rare, or nonexistent as they were largely illiterate and uneducated and did not leave records of their own experiences. This is particularly true of women. As many scholars have argued, the women of Spain and its empire were relegated to the "second sphere" of gendered work. Women had the obligation to bear, raise, instruct, and nurture children. Women also had to manage the household. Spanish women who were good Catholics were not supposed to have a public role or even show interest in public issues, including education, politics, and theology. These spheres were the prerogatives of men, and theology was only for the educated clergy. This stratification only became more stringent following the Council of Trent, when the Catholic Church increased its expectations for men and

women as a way to counteract criticism from Protestant reformers. Yet a segment of the female laity actively engaged in public discourse.¹

The essential questions of this dissertation center on the ability of female lay visionaries to function in Spanish post-Tridentine Catholic society. What limitations did they face that are distinct from those faced by lay visionaries before Trent? What were they still able to accomplish? How did their communities react to them? How and why did some support them and others doubt them? Were women able to teach, speak, and write to the public on spiritual and theological matters despite prohibitions against such activities? How did these roles evolve as Spain expanded to include more territory? How did women interpret their own status? How did they navigate, interpret, and enhance their own spiritual lives and the lives of others? All these questions converge in one major historiographical question that continues to be debated: what power did lay visionary women hold, and what roles were they able to fill outside the home in the early modern Spanish Empire?

I argue that women who had visions, dreams, manifestations, or prophecies from God inserted themselves into the ongoing development of spirituality and theology through personal action and written discourse in their roles as nurturing women. In the tight, devout communities of the Spanish Empire, these women, and those who supported them, interpreted their divinely inspired entrance into public discussions as a logical extension of their position as Catholic women. I further argue that, counter to most historians' presumptions, the "familial" community of the Catholic Church expected these visionary women to share these visions and lessons as an aspect of their responsibilities as women of the Catholic Church. Through their visions, these

¹ Mary Elizabeth Perry, *Gender and Disorder in Early Modern Seville* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), pp. 1–15.

women taught, advised, nurtured, and supported the spiritual and devotional lives of those around them as a logical extension of the model of a “good Catholic woman.” They carried out these roles as part of a “spiritual motherhood.” Spiritual motherhood gave these women religious authority and a public voice, despite social and ecclesiastical pressure that sought to keep women out of the interpretation of the spiritual, believed to be the province of the ordained and the educated men of society.

The importance of spiritual motherhood in creating a public voice for women in society is also evident in Spain’s colonies. Lima, Peru, featured many laywomen who had visions, including the first American saint, Rosa of Lima. My project examines the case of Luisa Melgarejo de Sotomayor from Peru to demonstrate how the idea of spiritual motherhood operated across the Atlantic. By including cities and communities outside of Spain, this project demonstrates that spiritual motherhood was an enduring and adaptable concept that allowed women across the Spanish world to transform society’s expectations for the sexes into a means of authority.

Scholars such as Joan Scott and Judith Butler have made possible a large-scale analysis of gender roles as a mutable historical manifestation.² They argued that an individual’s actions, thoughts, and opinions can be interpreted and experienced differently in gendered terms. Following this gender analysis, I examine the actions of women visionaries from the perspectives of their detractors and their supporters. Detractors viewed speaking about spiritual or doctrinal matters in the town church or plaza as inappropriate for a Catholic woman, while supporters

² Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990); Joan Wallach Scott, “Gender, A Useful Category of Analysis,” chapter two in *Gender and the Politics of History*, Thirtieth Anniversary Edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).

conceptualized these actions as an expected and desirable extension of motherhood, society's and God's prescribed role for women. This gender analysis often focuses on language and assessment of individual phrases used to describe women and women's actions. Following this method, I focus on individual phrases and words that the visionaries and those around them used to describe them and their experiences. Some examples of positive words are *madre, hermana, hija, santa, santísima, sierva de Dios, buena cristiana*, and so on (mother, sister, daughter, holy [or saint/saintly], very holy, servant of God, good Christian). Labels that evidenced doubt and anger among the community included *ilusa, embustera, mujer mala, mentirosa, visionaria falsa, bruja*, and so on (deceived visionary, deceiver, bad woman, liar, false visionary, witch). All these words have connotations and contexts that evaluate these women based on social, spiritual, and gender norms that determined their ability to function within their communities. My analysis follows this methodology in digging into the context of these women's lives and focusing on what roles and actions were or were not permitted depending on how communities described the visionaries and interpreted their actions.

I argue that these women not only held great authority but were supported and expected to have an extensive reach throughout the Atlantic and Mediterranean Catholic literature, faith, and social politics. While most spiritual mothers (including all the women analyzed here) faced the same fundamental route to authority (community engagement and opinion and divine blessings translated into religious authority) each chapter has a separate focus to emphasize the different challenges and lifestyles that could be navigated through spiritual motherhood. Each chapter follows the life and experience of one spiritual mother, chosen to emphasize different routes and challenges of this means to authority.

Note on the transcription of original documentation

Since the main primary sources for this dissertation consist of unpublished manuscripts in Spanish, which I have translated, I have thought it would be helpful for readers to transcribe in the footnotes portions of the documents cited. For the most part, I have modernized the original spelling, changed capitalizations, and inserted punctuation and accents as necessary to facilitate the reading or to clarify the original sense. I have also modernized the spelling of names (for example, Josefa for Josepha, Rafaela for Raphaela, Teresa for Theresa, etc.).

Chapter 1: Defining Spiritual Motherhood: Luisa Melgarejo de Soto and Early Modern Catholic Femininity

Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop. For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged. The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets. For God is not a God of disorder but of peace—as in all the congregations of the Lord’s people.

Women should remain silent in the Catholic Churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the Catholic Church.

—St. Paul (1 Corinthians 14:29–34)

Introduction:

Spiritual motherhood was rooted in what Spanish Catholic society determined was feminine and what responsibilities and behaviors it expected of women. The terms that individuals, and their neighbors, used to describe both the feminine and a female were of great importance. Words like *santa*, *virtuosa*, *buena cristiana*, *buena sierva de Dios*, and *obediente* (holy, virtuous, good Christian woman, good servant of God, and obedient), among many others, described what a good Catholic woman was and how she should behave based on a collective understanding of the “good woman.” These models of femininity that Spanish Catholic society forged were closely associated with mothering: a woman was expected to instruct and edify her children in Catholic belief and virtue, care for their worldly needs, heal their injuries and illnesses, and support and obey the male authorities in her life: her husband and the clergy. If a woman remained within those models, she had great leeway to expand her activities into a more public setting, caring for the greater community as her spiritual family.

Historians of gender and gender politics have long argued about which societal roles permitted women to perform and function in society. These arguments have included large-scale

discussions by scholars such as Judith Butler, who have argued over the very definition of woman in the modern world. Historians Mónica Díaz (*Indigenous Writings from the Convent*) and Stacey Schlauf (*Gendered Crime and Punishment*) have discussed, generally and specifically, how women behaved, lived, and were described in Spanish Catholic culture in the early modern period.³ Still deeper are the analyses of scholars such as Alison Weber and Nancy van Deusen, who have focused on individual women's personal interpretations, writings, and actions in light of the cultural expectations surrounding them, most notably those of Teresa of Ávila (Weber) and Luisa Melgarejo de Soto (van Deusen).⁴ All of these works share the core background concept that certain characteristics and behaviors defined "woman" and the "feminine," which were inextricably linked to whether spiritual motherhood would blossom or fail at a given time and place. This dissertation offers the model of the spiritual mother as one powerful example of the feminine in early modern Spanish society. These societies defined a "good" spiritual mother

³ Mónica Díaz, *Indigenous Writings from The Convent: Negotiating Ethnic Autonomy in Colonial Mexico* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2010), pp. 1–25. Mónica Díaz, *To Be Indio in Colonial Spanish America* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2017), pp. 1–15. Stacey Schlauf, *Spanish American Women's Use of the Word: Colonial through Contemporary Narratives* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2001), pp. xi-27. Stacey Schlauf, *Gendered Crime and Punishment: Women in the Hispanic Inquisitions* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2013), pp. 3–37.

⁴ Stacey Schlauf, *Untold Sisters: Hispanic Nuns in Their Own Works* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2010), pp. xvii-30. Nancy E. van Deusen, *Between the Sacred and the Worldly: The Institutional and Cultural Practice of Recogimiento in Colonial Lima* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp. 1–17. Nancy E. van Deusen, *Global Indios: The Indigenous Struggle for Justice in Sixteenth-Century Spain* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), pp. 1–18. Nancy E. van Deusen, "In so celestial a language': Text as body, relics as text," in Mónica Díaz and Rocío Quispe-Agnoli, eds., *Women's Negotiations and Textual Agency in Latin America, 1500–1799* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2017), pp. 1–10. Alison Weber, *Approaches to Teaching Teresa of Ávila and the Spanish Mystics* (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2009). Alison Weber, *Teresa of Ávila and the Rhetoric of Femininity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), pp. 3–17.

in terms of virtue and charitable/caring actions, and spiritual mothers were thus good women who lived up to a feminine ideal.

Luisa Melgarejo de Soto of Lima, Peru (1578–1651), represents a valuable example. She and her fellow visionaries and religious enthusiasts contributed to the development of social norms and gender expectations for Catholics based on Spanish norms and expectations in a land where Spaniards were a minority.⁵ They were influential in shaping the new traditions of Catholicism and visionary women, lay and religious, in Peru, and Spanish America in general, for generations to come. This was especially true because Melgarejo associated closely with Rosa of Lima, the first saint from the Americas. Melgarejo and her collaborators shaped and defined the ideals of a *buena cristiana* (good Christian woman) and a *mujer buena* (good woman). As such, they were foundational figures of spiritual motherhood in Spanish American Catholic society. Her efforts to build and shape Lima’s religious life are also tied to her own personal background as one of the first to be born in Peru to two immigrant Spaniards. To make sense of her contribution, it is first essential to establish the basic facts about Luisa de Melgarejo’s biography.

Brief Biography:

Melgarejo was born in Tunja, Nueva Granada (nowadays in Colombia), in 1578.

Melgarejo and her family were of the elite class. Her parents, Alonso Jara Melgarejo and

⁵ The main primary source for this chapter is the “Proceso de fe de Luisa Melgarejo, 1622–1624,” located in the Archivo Histórico Nacional (AHN), Madrid, Spain, Consejo de la Inquisición, Legajo 1647, Exp. 5. It is available in the Portal de Archivos Españoles (PARES) of the Spanish Ministry of Education, Culture, and Sports: <http://pares.mcu.es/>.

Francisca Ortiz de Zúñiga, were hidalgos from Seville. She moved to Lima, Peru, in 1600 and became renowned as one of the great beauties of city.⁶

In Lima she attracted the attention of Doctor Juan de Soto (hereafter referred to as “de Soto”), a scholar and *abogado* (lawyer). When he met Melgarejo, de Soto had already published two collaborative works of literature (in 1602 and 1603) and was serving as “asesor de indios y relator de la Real Audiencia” (assessor of the natives and scribe of the viceroyalty). De Soto would also become president of San Marcos University in Lima.

From 1603 to 1610, Melgarejo and de Soto became frequent attendees at the regular gatherings that took place at the house of Gonzalo de la Maza, a *contador* (accountant) of the Santa Cruzada (holy crusade).⁷ De la Maza had known de Soto through their work in the viceroyalty; he was interested in theology and the supernatural expressions of visions, ecstatic trances, raptures, and the like. De la Maza regularly hosted gatherings in his home, where priests, visionaries, and Lima’s elite would meet to discuss various topics related to the Catholic faith and to witness one or more of the visionary women in action. Those attending included many Jesuit priests, who lived nearby in the Colegio de San Pablo.

By 1610 Melgarejo and de Soto had been living together for years, causing some scandal in the city. That year, de Soto lost his position with the viceroyalty and married Melgarejo.

Together they moved into a house de Soto bought from de la Maza, located across from the

⁶ Luis Miguel Glave, “De Rosa y espinas, creación de mentalidades criollas en los Andes (1600–1630),” *Instituto de Estudios Peruanos*, Documento de Trabajo n. 52, Serie Historia, n. 8. 1993, p. 16.

⁷ Glave, “De Rosa y espinas,” pp. 17–19. Frank Graziano mentions Melgarejo as part of de la Maza’s inner circle and suggests that de la Maza was the glue that held this community of mystics together; *Wounds of Love: The Mystical Marriage of Saint Rose of Lima* (London: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 94–95.

Jesuit Colegio and its chapel. Though many considered Melgarejo below de Soto's station, together they continued to engage in Lima's high society.⁸ After her marriage, Melgarejo remained in elite circles and relationships throughout her life, with a few notable exceptions. As Schlau has observed, Melgarejo and de Soto's home became "an important cultural and intellectual gathering place."⁹

During one of the gatherings at de la Maza's house in 1612, Melgarejo had a fateful encounter. She met Rosa de Santa María, who would become known as Rosa of Lima. They became friends and confidantes. From 1612 to 1617, Melgarejo and Rosa attended the same gatherings, at which they experienced many visions and trances.¹⁰ They engaged with a large and vibrant community of visionary women of various backgrounds, as well as theologians, priests, and various interested members of de la Maza's and de Soto's personal circles. The recorded visions of these women circulated throughout the group and beyond, reaching Quito and Cuzco in the hands of various priests.¹¹ This was Melgarejo's lifestyle until 1617, when Rosa died. Melgarejo outlived Rosa by thirty-four years.

While already exceptional in some ways owing to her station, Melgarejo's own spiritual experiences increased and developed throughout her lifetime, shaping her status and her ability to be a spiritual mother.¹² She experienced visions and ecstasies and was encouraged or

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Schlau, *Spanish American Women's Use of the Word*, pp. 88–89.

¹⁰ Van Deusen, "In so celestial a language."

¹¹ *Proceso de fe de Luisa Melgarejo, 1622–1624*, Fray Pedro de Loayza, images 34–37. All my references to the original trial documentation are from the images of the digitized document available in PARES.

¹² Van Deusen, "In so celestial a language," pp. 64–66.

commanded (by her confessor, Diego Alvarez de la Paz of the Jesuits) to begin recording her visions.¹³

After Rosa of Lima's death in 1617, Melgarejo was the leading figure in Rosa's canonization process. Much of what we know about Melgarejo comes from documents related to Rosa's canonization and from the writings of a young woman, Úrsula de Jesús, who became a nun after her time in Melgarejo's home as a slave. She described her former mistress as a woman of great virtue who taught her what it meant to be Catholic, exemplifying what Úrsula de Jesús came to associate with the visionary women of Lima.¹⁴ This was particularly telling of Melgarejo's lasting influence over women's Catholic culture in Lima, for Úrsula de Jesús herself went on to become a renowned visionary and mystic in Lima.

In 1623 the Inquisition arrested Melgarejo on suspicion of being an *ilusa* (one whose visions were of dubious origin, perhaps demonic), an *embustera* (one who lied about having visions), and a woman who sought *vanagloria* (one who aspired to personal gain through religious practice). There is still some debate among scholars—including Schlauf, van Deusen, and others—as to the possible political reasons behind her arrest and its link to Rosa of Lima's canonization process. Some have argued that Melgarejo was arrested to remove her as a competitor to Rosa and clear the latter's ascension to sainthood.¹⁵

¹³ Fernando Iwasaki Cauti, "Luisa Melgarejo de Soto, ángel de luz o de tinieblas," *América sin nombre*, n. 15, December 2010, pp. 59–86, at 59–60, available in: <https://americasinnombre.ua.es/article/view/2010-n15-luisa-melgarejo-de-soto-angel-de-luz-o-de-tinieblas>.

¹⁴ Úrsula de Jesús, *The Souls of Purgatory: The Spiritual Diary of a Seventeenth-Century Afro-Peruvian Mystic*, Úrsula de Jesús, translated, edited, and with an introduction by Nancy E. van Deusen (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2004).

¹⁵ Irene Silverblatt, *Modern Inquisitions: Peru and the Colonial Origins of the Civilized World* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), pp. 3–28.

Remarkably, Melgarejo's inquisitorial trial was suspended without sentencing, even though several *beatas* (lay women who took vows similar to nuns in religious orders) in her circle received death sentences and were executed at an auto-da-fé. As this chapter shows, Melgarejo successfully defended herself, her visions, and her actions by upholding a model of humility, obedience, piety, and compassion for her community and fellow Catholics. After the trial, she continued to live and behave as a spiritual mother, and upon her death in 1651 she was celebrated in the streets of Lima as a saint (or at least a saintly person).¹⁶

Melgarejo and Her Spiritual Community:

It is impossible to understand Melgarejo's career as a spiritual mother outside of her spiritual community, whose most important member was Rosa of Lima. Historians have referred to Melgarejo during her formative years as a "Thorn of the Rose of Lima." This has important implications for her reputation as a spiritual mother. Melgarejo is remembered primarily as a follower, sister, daughter, or trusted confidante of Rosa of Lima. The two women established a very close relationship.¹⁷ According to van Deusen, "Melgarejo showed her writings to Rose on bended knee as a sign of reverence and humility."¹⁸ Their relationship established Melgarejo's understanding of what constituted a good Catholic visionary, saint, and spiritual mother.¹⁹

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

¹⁷ Clara García Aylurado, *Manifestaciones religiosas en el mundo colonial americano* (México: Universidad Iberoamericana, 1997), p. 125.

¹⁸ Úrsula De Jesús, *Souls of Purgatory*, p. 16.

¹⁹ Kathleen Ann Myers, *Neither Saints Nor Sinners: Writing the Lives of Women in Spanish America* (London: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 34.

Melgarejo and Rosa of Lima belonged to a spiritual community of men and women.²⁰

Those who were most directly involved in this community—attending meetings, writing down their interpretations of events, recording the content of their own and others visions, and so on— included the following:

- Women:
 - Luisa Melgarejo
 - Rosa of Lima
 - Inés de Velasco, a thirty-five-year-old “Spaniard” born in Peru, married to Hernando Ropero
 - Ana María Pérez, a forty-year-old *cuarterona* (quadron), known as *la platera* (the woman silversmith) from her marriage to a silversmith
 - Isabel de Ormaza, a forty-one-year-old widow and *beata*
 - María de Santo Domingo, a twenty-year-old Franciscan beata born in Peru
 - Inés de Ubiarte, a thirty-seven-year-old *india* (woman of Native American descent), a nun in the *Convento de la Encarnación de Lima*
 - Isabel de Soto, Melgarejo’s sister-in-law
 - María de Usategui, the wife of Gonzalo de la Maza
 - María Antonia, an ecstatic woman and friend of de la Maza
- Laymen
 - Juan de Soto, Melgarejo’s husband
 - Gonzalo de la Maza, who hosted the events of various religious groups, recorded Melgarejo’s and others’ visions, and held copies of the edited works
 - Hernando Ropero, the husband of Inés de Velasco
- Priests
 - Francisco Nieto, a Dominican who recorded Melgarejo’s visions
 - Diego Álvarez de Paz, a Jesuit, the first confessor who commanded Melgarejo to start writing down her visions
 - Diego Martínez, an eighty-one-year-old Spanish Jesuit, a confessor to Melgarejo and others, who recorded and edited Melgarejo’s visions
 - Diego de Torres, a forty-nine-year-old Jesuit, prefect of “cosas espirituales” (spiritual things), who recorded and edited Melgarejo’s visions”
 - Francisco de Contreras, a forty-seven-year-old Jesuit, born in La Paz, who recorded and edited Melgarejo’s visions

²⁰ Fernando Iwasaki Cauti, “Mujeres al borde de la perfección: Rosa de Santa María y las alumbradas de Lima,” *The Hispanic American Review*, Vol. 73, No. 4 (Nov. 1993), pp. 581–613.

This community thus consisted of fervent men and women, mystics, male religious, and the social and administrative elite of Peru. Yet race and a married status were not essential for its membership to this group, which was atypical as compared to similar groups in Mexico or Spain. It grew out of mutual interest in and support for the pursuit of the Catholic traditions. These men and women forged a network to help solidify a Catholic community and, eventually, a mystic tradition of their own. The women of this community, and the men who supported them, created a unique space in which they were able to develop their faith and their understanding of the visionary gifts that God had bestowed on them.

The men in the community were mostly immigrant Spanish Jesuit priests, or members of the viceroyalty's government. As noted above, Juan de Soto was a prominent member of the group, not only because of his relationship with Melgarejo, and through her with Rosa of Lima, but also because a good number of the community's events took place under his roof.²¹

De la Maza increased the community's reputation and status. The Spanish *contador* was a central figure in Liman high society.²² He and his wife contributed not only to the founding of their community but also to the support network that surrounded them. He and his wife even collected many of the *beatas'* writings when they recorded their experiences in order to explore and understand them.²³ The couple's support of Melgarejo continued until their deaths in the 1630s.

The Jesuit priests and professors made up the core of the religious support the community enjoyed, and they contributed to the group's legitimacy. They were famed for their reputation as

²¹ Proceso de fe de Luisa Melgarejo, images 22–24.

²² Úrsula de Jesús, *Souls of Purgatory*, p. 16.

²³ Proceso de fe de Luisa Melgarejo, image 159.

educators and religious scholars. As the viceroyalty was forming, the higher-ranking citizens of Lima had requested the Jesuits' presence in the city for this very reason.²⁴ Moreover, as Antonio Prieto has observed, "unlike the monastic orders, the Jesuit ministries in Europe were characterized by active engagement with the secular life of the cities where they were established."²⁵ The Jesuits offered their theological and educational expertise to the community surrounding Melgarejo and served as confessors for several of the men and women who formed the community.

Melgarejo gravitated toward the Jesuit Colegio de San Pablo. Her house was a mere "stone's throw away" from the institution.²⁶ Van Deusen has noted that this proximity not only facilitated "her familiarity with some of the most important Jesuit intellectuals of the time" but also "gained her access to the society's four-thousand-volume library, considered the most extensive collection in Lima."²⁷ She supported the Colegio out of her own personal wealth.

Her devotion and studiousness under the guidance of the Jesuits caused many, including Úrsula and others she employed, as well as members of the broader Liman community, to consider her a "saint in her own right."²⁸ Indeed, this relationship with the priests is one of the core components of what made Melgarejo a "good woman" and a good spiritual mother.

Behavior and Language:

²⁴ Andrés Prieto, *Missionary Scientists: Jesuit Science in Spanish South America 1570–1810* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2011), pp. 13–18.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

²⁶ Úrsula De Jesús, *Souls of Purgatory*, p. 12.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

²⁸ Proceso de fe de Luisa Melgarejo, images 151–153.

One of the key components of successful spiritual motherhood was obedience to male authority, above all, one's husband and one's confessor. From the beginning of her spiritual career, Melgarejo placed herself in a position of deference to her husband, the Jesuit priests, and her confessor, Diego Martínez. In several of her letters and writings, she explained that she began writing and being written about by the "manda de mi padre espiritual" (order of my spiritual father).²⁹ In addition, Martínez and other priests commanded her to perform acts of penitence that she detailed in her letters.

Rosa of Lima established the pattern of behavior for a good religious woman. At its core was asceticism. Melgarejo obeyed her confessor and mimicked Rosa of Lima. She fasted. She refrained from pleasures, including comfortable sleeping arrangements, and at times performed acts of self-flagellation or wounding. She reported that most of these acts were ordered by her confessor and that she, as a good Catholic woman under the guidance of the Jesuit scholars, obeyed. This was behavior expected of a "good woman" during this time.³⁰ More important, it would contribute to the spiritual gifts she would receive from God.

Another key aspect of spiritual motherhood—its behaviors and patterns of feminine virtue—was receiving visions, visits from dead spirits, and various other manifestations of supernatural favor. Melgarejo established early in her career that she held this favor. She had many visions, most occurring either in her home or in the chapel of the Colegio de San Pablo.

By 1610 she and three Jesuits began recording and editing written accounts of her visions. As the frequency, depth, and importance of her visions continued to grow, the priests went a step further and kept the documents in various folders in their personal collections and

²⁹ Proceso de fe de Luisa Melgarejo, personal correspondence, image 12.

³⁰ Ibid., images 12–14.

notes to better understand and advise their penitent through these potentially difficult experiences.³¹ The venue of the Jesuit chapel of San Pablo adjacent to the Colegio allowed for discussion, as well as witnessing of the special gifts of Melgarejo and others. Yet only a certain kind of person would have attended Mass at San Pablo. Because it was not a parish chapel, the masses there were more exclusive, attended only by those who sought it out rather than by parishioners who were expected to attend.³² Those who chose to do so were perhaps the target audience with whom Melgarejo sought to interact and whom, as some claimed later, she wished to attract as her followers.³³

The greatest example of her close connection to the supernatural was in her eventual role in the canonization of St. Rosa. Van Deusen describes perhaps the most famous of Melgarejo's visions: "In 1617, as Rosa lay dying Melgarejo sat by her side singing and playing the guitar. Once she expired, Doña Luisa entered a mystical trance, envisioning her friend's triumphant entry into heaven."³⁴ Her vision played an instrumental role in Rosa's canonization process as evidence of her saintly status. Moreover, the spiritual community that had formed around the saint took up the cause and carried it forward. The supernatural was important, but perhaps more important was how a "good woman" would translate that status into action in her community.

Another important facet of spiritual motherhood and "ideal" femininity related to how a spiritual mother used her status as a font of knowledge. Melgarejo educated those around her in

³¹ Ibid., images 50–69. This section looks at the testimonies of three Jesuit priests who wrote and kept the collected visions of Luisa Melgarejo de Soto in the Colegio de San Pablo.

³² Ibid., images 62–67.

³³ Ibid., referring to various instances throughout the case in which she stood accused of the crime of faking her visions and or attempting to damn as many people as possible. This is seen in the several accusations but summed up best by the letter of Andrés Gaytán to the Suprema in *ibid.*, images 151–154.

³⁴ Úrsula de Jesús, *Souls of Purgatory*, p. 16.

spirituality and what it meant to be a good Catholic. Most notably, Úrsula de Jesús learned a great deal from her. Úrsula described her time in Melgarejo's household, learning from her, as the most important and formative period of her spiritual life. She described how Melgarejo would read religious texts aloud to her and then explain why the lessons were important. Úrsula wrote about how Melgarejo "me enseñó" (taught me) and how they were almost always on the subject of "la santa Madre Iglesia y la fe" (the holy Mother Church and the faith).³⁵

As a young servant (in her teens), Úrsula was present at many of the private gatherings the de Soto household hosted. She even witnessed the blossoming friendship between Rosa of Lima and Melgarejo. She saw the benefits, firsthand, of a devotional lifestyle and had Melgarejo actively guiding her first steps into what would eventually become a lifetime of devotion for Úrsula. One can see how Melgarejo taught about the faith, performing one of the key functions of spiritual motherhood. She also served as a guiding influence for the broader spiritual community of Lima.

Priests and other members of the spiritual community asked Melgarejo questions about the mysteries of life, death, and the spirit. Besides her most notable contribution, when she witnessed Rosa's soul enter heaven in a vision, she also reported the fates of several priests who died far away from Lima, "in the provinces," before news of their death reached Lima itself. One witness, the Jesuit priest Francisco Coello, reported that Melgarejo told him spontaneously that Father Esteban (of the provinces) had died and that she had seen his soul enter heaven. Two days later, this same witness reported, the group accompanying his body arrived and news of his death spread. Coello went on to record "otras visiones y revelaciones" (other visions and revelations) she had.

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 13–15.

Melgarejo performed in this instance, and apparently others, as a source of spiritual knowledge to the Jesuit priesthood about the fate of their members after death, assuaging fears and offering hope, as a mother would to grieving family members. This gift of seeing the fate of the dead was shared by the other spiritual mothers and was often sought after within the community.³⁶

A “good woman” and spiritual mother had to behave in the ways described, and those around them had to confirm this. Supporters of Melgarejo and her fellow *beatas* described them as “santas y buenas mujeres” (saints and good women).³⁷ She was “una mujer virtuosa” (a virtuous woman) who demonstrated “obediencia” (obedience).³⁸ These statements demonstrate strong approval of her, with the words *good woman* being directly associated with her. Witnesses also described what “good women” did not do. Doubters and detractors accused Melgarejo of “ostentación y vanidad” (ostentation and vanity).³⁹ Overwhelmingly, during her years with Rosa of Lima, the community considered Melgarejo a “good woman” because she behaved as such. Virtue, modesty, and education made her a spiritual mother.

Melgarejo on Her Own:

After Rosa of Lima’s death, Melgarejo’s reputation was not sufficient to protect the community from criticism and eventually denunciation to the Inquisition. Her case shows how delicate the relationship between a spiritual mother and her followers could be, and how it broke

³⁶ Proceso de beatificación y canonización de Rosa de Santa María, Archivo Arzobispal, Lima, Perú, pp. 9–12.

³⁷ Proceso de fe de Luisa Melgarejo, Franciscan Fray Gerónimo de Vasera, December 3, 1622, Inés de Inojosa, widow from Trujillo, Spain, September 10, 1623, image 55.

³⁸ Ibid., Francisco de Contreras, image 55.

³⁹ Ibid, Jesuit Father Juan Muñoz, “Denunciación,” July 12, 1622.

down under the Inquisition's gaze. Melgarejo's friendship with Rosa of Lima was instrumental in the development of their spiritual community, which she, in large part, protected and nurtured after Rosa's death. Melgarejo then watched the community dissolve around her once faced with the accusations of the Inquisition. Yet, despite the charges leveled against her and the dissolution of her spiritual community in the 1625 auto-da-fé, she survived and endeavored for years, with dogged determination, to rebuild a mystical community in Lima.⁴⁰

For the five years between Rosa of Lima's death and the denunciation to the Inquisition in 1622, Melgarejo fulfilled the role of the dead saint's best friend and leader in the spiritual community. This role primarily consisted of hosting the gatherings of the community within her home, continuing to have visions in the public venue of the Jesuit chapel in San Pablo, and sharing that information with her supporters throughout the city.⁴¹ However, though she had succeeded in venerating Rosa and filling the void that Rosa left behind, the process of establishing herself as the sole spiritual mother of the community not only was difficult but earned her the animosity of several prominent and, ultimately, dangerous opponents.

One of the primary reasons that Melgarejo could fill the gap left by Rosa of Lima was the fact that both were visionaries and ascetics who were highly regarded in the city. However, this authority derived from an unfettered mysticism, which was considerably more dangerous for a laywoman than for spiritual women with similar gifts who lived under the supervision of Church institutions. Unlike those women, Melgarejo never took personal holy vows. Yet she still had the

⁴⁰ For an account of these events, see Henry Kamen's *The Spanish Inquisition: A Historical Review* (New Haven, CT: Yale, University Press, 1997), pp. 374–395.

⁴¹ Proceso de fe de Luisa Melgarejo, images 9–13.

blessing of the Jesuits and was the most famous member of the spiritual community in which they participated actively.⁴²

While all her previous efforts had established Melgarejo as a good woman and a spiritual mother, she was still operating in a society that was generally suspicious of women's motivations. Education and experience in identifying the source of spiritual gifts—divine or diabolic—were usually denied to women, no matter how good they were. This represents another reason that spiritual mothers relied on confessors and other men to establish their legitimacy; confessors always played a prominent role in any inquisitorial or court proceedings against them. Melgarejo, a member and leader of an elite community of Spaniards, Creoles, and religious men in Lima, could potentially have led many hundreds of souls astray.

Despite her erstwhile association with the Rose of Lima, as Schlau has argued, the Inquisition recognized in her a dangerous growth of lay power unchecked by sufficient male oversight in America's fledgling Catholicism.⁴³ The resulting hostility that developed over the five years after Rosa's death worked directly against her status as a popular visionary throughout Liman high society. Despite the potency of her visions, and the readiness with which the Jesuits accepted them, Melgarejo's authority as a spiritual mother, and thus a good woman, came into question, and that was directly associated with her behavior.

One especially gray area with regard to the behavior of a good woman and spiritual mother was writing. Melgarejo wrote down many of her visions and raptures in her own hand.⁴⁴

⁴² Grace M. Jantzen, *Power, Gender, and Christian Mysticism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 160.

⁴³ Schlau, *Spanish American Women's Use of the Word*, pp. 89–90.

⁴⁴ *Proceso de fe de Luisa Melgarejo*, pp. 19–22. This is just one reference to the fact that Luisa wrote many of the pages of the folders found; there are many more.

This furthered her tenuous position, as Catholic authorities were particularly suspicious of independent writing, as part of the Counter-Reformation's efforts to prevent further large-scale outbreaks of heresy based on collected writings, like those that had occurred in Germany under Martin Luther.⁴⁵ Her ability to record the majority of her visions herself aided her in spreading the knowledge of her gifts and visions, and through this gaining prestige and a broader audience for her mothering touch. When asked, many of those who believed in the authenticity of her visions reported that they had either seen her enraptured or read about her visions. Melgarejo's sister-in-law related how Melgarejo shared her visions with St. Rosa of Lima and four fathers of the Society of Jesus, who took testimony in writing.⁴⁶

Writing served to create a community via paper for Melgarejo, an extension of what she had already done in establishing herself as a good woman and spiritual mother. By corresponding with others and recording her visions, she taught and guided both at home and from a distance regarding what happened after death. The importance of writing went further still, for the Jesuits included her in their reports to Rome, building for her not only a citywide reputation but a transatlantic one as well. Here reputation only increased as her name and visions became key evidence in the beatification and canonization of Rosa of Lima.⁴⁷ Writing factored as one of the essential components in how Melgarejo built her status as the central visionary figure of Lima after Rosa of Lima's death. As always, the power to communicate over large areas and distances cannot be disregarded.

⁴⁵ Nora E. Jaffary, *False Mystics: Deviant Orthodoxy in Colonial Mexico* (Lincoln Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), pp. 36–39.

⁴⁶ Proceso de fe de Luisa Melgarejo, image 40: “tomaron cuatro padres de la compañía por testimonio por escrito.”

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, images 4–5.

As a woman who had managed to gain a following of many men and women, she represented exactly the kind of woman who could most easily cause a panic if investigators determined that the devil was the source of her visionary authority. It is unclear whether Melgarejo perceived the danger a sudden outpouring of venom against her could present. What is clear is that she had carefully built relationships with the men around her, maintaining enough of a stance of femininity to not cause them to withdraw in alarm at her growing status as an educator and spiritual authority, until the Inquisition finally received a denunciation against her. And through her influence on these men, she built a significant enough position in their hearts and minds that she guided them, at the same time as she relied on them, during the period following the death of Rosa.⁴⁸

Melgarejo's Trial:

On July 12, 1622, Father Juan Muñoz of the Company of Jesus went voluntarily to the tribunal of Lima to denounce Melgarejo.⁴⁹ His denunciation was one more in a string of accusations against several members of the spiritual community of which Melgarejo had been an active participant for years and, more recently, a leader. More than anything, Father Muñoz's testimony points to the ambiguities in her relationships and, moreover, his knowledge of them. While he had firsthand knowledge of her actions and behavior, as his testimony shows, he did not relate, and the Inquisitor did not ask, how he had acquired this information.

One of the first relationships that Father Muñoz highlighted in his denunciation of Melgarejo was her connection to the Jesuits of the Colegio de San Pablo and, more specifically,

⁴⁸ Kamen, *Spanish Inquisition*, pp. 174–178. The Inquisition's hands were largely tied until someone first denounced an individual.

⁴⁹ Proceso de fe de Luisa Melgarejo, Juan Muñoz, July 12, 1622, images 3ff.

to her confessor, who was a member of the order, and to her husband. He emphasized that she had gained an undue amount of influence in the pursuit of her own vainglory and, with this aim, had faked her raptures and visions. If true, these accusations would mean she was not a good woman. A good woman would not be so ostentatious or vain as to want visions for her personal glory.

Some of the best information about Melgarejo's relationships to men resulted from the inquisitors' desire to clarify why Muñoz considered her case one that the Inquisition should investigate and try. Muñoz provided a detailed list of the reasons he believed that she was an "embustera" (liar/deceiver) pursuing personal gain.⁵⁰ All told, he made six claims as to why she should be suspected of engaging in misdeeds and being a "bad woman." The first four claims are listed in detail in the notes from her trial, as they most clearly demonstrate the relationships she had to the male authorities in her life: "The first reason was because her revelation or the apparition of the soul of Father Diego Álvarez [the Jesuit whose soul she had seen rise to heaven, which she claimed to have had before hearing news of his death] was not seen until after the news of his death reached Lima."⁵¹ His second claim was a more focused version of the first: he was concerned that she had not witnessed the souls of any other Jesuit priests known for their "muy gran santidad en la común opinión de todos" (very great holiness in the common opinion of all).⁵² Simply put, he saw Melgarejo's seeing the soul of Álvarez as an obvious attempt at

⁵⁰ Ibid, image 6.

⁵¹ Ibid., image 7: "Lo primero porque la revelación o aparición de la misma del Padre Diego Álvarez referida no se supo que la tuviese hasta que la nueva de su muerte llegó a Lima."

⁵² Ibid.: "Lo segundo que habiendo muerto en la misma compañía otros religiosos ... de muy gran santidad en la común opinión de todos los religiosos de ella de tanto y mayor satisfacción que los sobredichos, pero no conocidos ni honrados de la gente de fuera de estos no se sabe ni se ha dicho que la dicha doña Luisa haya tenido revelación ni aparición."

gaining popularity, as she knew of his death from her vision which she had in advance of the arrival of the news.

Third, Muñoz went on to cast doubt on her behavior in public. He reported that she would be in the chapel for four hours every morning and that Melgarejo claimed that “she did this to fulfill the obedience her confessor has imposed on her.”⁵³ He suspected her acts of penitence and prayer in the Jesuit chapel of San Pablo were not genuine devotion.

His fourth point casts more aspersions on her public acts of piety and respect for male authority—the foundation of what made her a good woman—and instead depicts her as an *embustera*:

The brothers *sacristanes* [in charge of the sacristy] of the Company, present and past, have said that they have witnessed many times that, while she was enraptured in the said church, Doctor Soto, her husband, wanting to take her home, calls her confessor, Padre Diego Martínez, to come and command her to get up, and the instant he commands her to do so, she awakens and gets up.⁵⁴

There is much information to glean from this testimony, not least of which is the ambiguity of her acceptance of the male authorities in her life. As Muñoz reported, she obeyed her confessor,

⁵³ Ibid., Juan Muñoz, images 8–9. “Lo tercero porque siendo costumbre de la dicha Doña Luisa estar en oración cada mañana en la iglesia de la compañía desde las ocho y media hasta las doce ... y ... a[l] dar las doce despierta y se levanta ... y parece a los sobredichos y a este denunciante y a otros de cuyos nombres no se acuerda ahora que si este fuera donde Dios y privilegio suyo no tuviera tan en la mano ... cobrar [?] cuando ella quiere si bien es verdad que se ha divulgado que la dicha Doña Luisa dice que al despertar luego en dando primero [la] campanada de las doce sucede así como por milagro por cumplir la obediencia que su confesor le ha puesto....”

⁵⁴ Ibid., image 10. “Lo cuarto [que] los hermanos sacristanes de la compañía presentes y pasados han dicho en casa que ellos han visto muchas veces que estando arrebatada la dicha Doña Luisa en la dicha iglesia y deseando el Doctor Soto, su marido, que cese el Rapto para llevarla a su casa, llama al Padre Diego Martínez su confesor para que le venga a mandar que se levante y que en mandándoselo luego al punto despierta y se levanta.”

but not her husband, both of whom she had a duty to show respect and deference in all things; this undermined the reports from others that she was a virtuous woman.

Muñoz underscored in his fourth reason the numerous times Melgarejo's husband would come to find her in the Colegio de San Pablos's chapel and command her to leave with him—a command to which, as Muñoz pointed out, Melgarejo did not respond. Here, a relationship of power is being challenged, something a good woman and spiritual mother would not do. Melgarejo did not listen to her husband and as such was worthy of suspicion as an improper woman in Muñoz's eyes. This behavior occurred on several occasions, both before and during Muñoz's time at the Colegio, and on each (or at least many) of those occasions, she did acknowledge the authority of her confessor. Melgarejo thus chose which authority she could or would respect. Clearly, Muñoz thought this behavior to be improper, even if she had chosen to obey God and her confessor, who had told her to be there in the first place.

Muñoz also denounced Melgarejo's writings for containing heresies, but in doing so, he also touched on the ambivalent attitudes toward a good woman writing down her spiritual experiences, which raised the suspicion that she might be recording those experiences to gain fame. He noted to the Inquisition that a great deal of writings, in her own hand, were kept by Jesuit priests among their papers. He claimed that these writings were all religious in nature, containing extensive descriptions of Melgarejo's religious experiences from 1605 to 1622. When asked why he had waited so long to come forward if he believed there to be heresy present in her writings, Muñoz responded that he was not sure that the Inquisition would believe the matter to be serious enough for their attention, an odd counterpoint to his seemingly strong doubts that Melgarejo was a good woman and spiritual mother.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Ibid., image 4.

Ultimately, the case against her centered on the texts. Up until 1622, it seemed that she had had the full support of the Jesuits of the Colegio de San Pablo, who had counseled and guided her throughout her spiritual journey up to this point. Furthermore, they had themselves recorded Melgarejo's visions and edited her writings for distribution. Her family members, the members of the spiritual community to which she and Rosa belonged, and powerful individuals in the government of the colony, like Gonzalo de la Maza, were all counted as supporters. However, as might be expected, when they were interrogated, spiritual motherhood's ambiguities caused some to backpedal, and some to break ranks, whereas others remained staunch in their belief in her as a visionary, a good woman, and a spiritual mother. Looking at how the various individuals and groups involved described her life and actions further elucidates just what spiritual motherhood was, what it could do and should not do, and what this reveals about the issue of female power in Spanish Catholic society.

Family:

Some of the key witnesses in Melgarejo's trial were her own family members: her husband and her sister-in-law, Isabel de Soto. The sister-in-law testified of her own volition, while the Inquisition called Doctor de Soto to testify. This disparity is noteworthy in that it set the tone for their depositions. Isabel de Soto's attitude was one of marked deference to Melgarejo but wariness of her sister-in-law's spiritual gifts. Juan de Soto attempted to avoid giving the tribunal too much information, not knowing what would be damning to his wife's case. Both testimonies revealed important evidence to the inquisitors, but, more important, they elucidate Melgarejo's fragile position and the vagaries of spiritual motherhood.

Isabel de Soto was a widow who had moved in with her brother's family after the death of her husband.⁵⁶ She came before the inquisitors "because I have an obligation to declare whether or not certain persons have had raptures or revelations, and I will put down what I can remember."⁵⁷ She went on to say how in many ways her sister-in-law was a fine woman to have in the family, being of Spanish descent and well educated, and that she had done her best to be a positive and helpful member of the family as a "una mujer buena" (a good woman).⁵⁸ Isabel asserted not only that Melgarejo was a good and helpful woman who was very spiritual but also that she had visions. Isabel related in detail how she heard a loud thump while the Jesuits and Melgarejo were recording the latter's statements in another room. When she investigated, she found an agitated group around an enraptured Melgarejo, who had just "volado" (flown or floated) in the air and fallen back to the floor.⁵⁹ Somewhat perplexed, but impressed, Isabel took this as evidence of her sister-in-law's spiritual veracity, that God had shown that she was a good woman and that she indeed was a spiritual mother.

Isabel's eyewitness testimony came late in the trial, a year after other testimonies had been given. Perhaps Isabel went to the Holy Office to defend her brother by claiming that he had been absent during the offending events.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, she was involved, at least obliquely, in the events surrounding the accused, though she claimed ignorance and came to the Inquisition of her own accord. Isabel revealed potentially damning information about her sister-in-law, despite saying what a "fine" woman she was. The motivations behind this are opaque, but a desire to

⁵⁶ Ibid., Juan Muñoz, July 12, 1622, image 42, and Úrsula de Jesús, *Souls of Purgatory*, p. 16.

⁵⁷ Proceso de fe de Luisa Melgarejo, image 39: "... tengo obligación de declarar si sé algo de algunas personas que han tenido arrobamientos o revelaciones y así pongo que lo que me acuerdo."

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

protect herself and her family is certainly a possible motive. What can be said for certain is that the events impacted Isabel, and she felt compelled to inform the inquisitors that she took them to be real.

Almost a month after his sister-in-law's appearance in the Holy Office, the Inquisition summoned Melgarejo's husband. Juan de Soto's role as husband and his involvement in the spiritual community implied a certain level of responsibility for his wife's suspicious behavior, which explains his unwillingness to appear before the Inquisition of his own accord.⁶¹ His first reaction when asked if he suspected why the Inquisition had summoned him was to say "that he could not think of a reason."⁶² The interview continued in this evasive way, with the doctor attempting to shield himself and his wife whenever possible. He spoke at length about the other visionary women within the community before admitting that his wife had been one of their number. De Soto claimed, "What I know is that I have heard that some people in this city have written papers [about visions] that they have received from our Lord, and that others have seen [the same] in a book that Don Carlos Viejo of Lima wrote."⁶³ By not using names beyond Don Carlos Viejo—whose identity is not known—he avoided implicating anyone directly, stating that Melgarejo was just one of many among the community who was writing and having visions from God.

The inquisitors continued their questioning, revealing the depth of their knowledge of the events surrounding Melgarejo, which they had gleaned over the course of a year's worth of

⁶¹ Jantzen, *Power, Gender, and Christian Mysticism*, p. 158, and Julio Caro Baroja, *Las formas complejas de la vida religiosa: Religión, sociedad y carácter en la España de los siglos XVI y XVII* (Madrid: Akal, 1978), pp. 78–86.

⁶² El proceso de Luisa Melgarejo, image 46.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, images 46–47: "que lo que sabe de lo que se le pregunta es haber oído decir que algunas personas de esta ciudad han escrito papeles [sobre visiones] que han recibido de nuestro Señor y otras [visiones] ha visto en un libro que escribió el Don Carlos Viejo de esta ciudad."

testimonies from other witnesses in the case. His awareness of the inquisitors' knowledge seems to have produced a change in Doctor de Soto's testimony, and he soon began to distance himself from his wife and her actions. What is particularly interesting about his sudden change in tone and approach was that he had clearly been involved in the activities surrounding her ecstasies and raptures but attempted to downplay his own role; he did not mention facts that would implicate him that other witnesses laid out in detail. When asked if he had written down any of Melgarejo's visions, the central offense of which she stood accused, he stated obliquely that he had not directly involved himself in most of the proceedings when that had taken place: "He said that he had not written or copied a single paper in his own letter and hand as [was the case with] those [papers] of Melgarejo his wife."⁶⁴ But then he almost immediately contradicted himself in the same response when he said that "he recalled that one or two times he took up a pen to write some of the things that she said that seemed noteworthy."⁶⁵

As the case became more and more damning of Melgarejo's activities and those of her fellow *beatas*, the support of those closest to her began to waver. As the Inquisition pursued her, the people whom she had trusted began to work against her, some actively, others indirectly, to protect themselves. This shows one of the limits on lay female authority and spiritual motherhood. Spiritual motherhood was founded on the definition of a woman who was pure of body and soul. Demons could not deceive her, and she certainly would not pretend to have

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., image 48. "Dijo que este que declara no la escribió, [ni] copiado papel ninguno de su letra y mano de los de la dicha Doña Luisa su mujer. Aunque en algunos éxtasis que ha tenido la susodicha y hablado algunas cosas, este declarante se acuerda que una o dos veces tomó la pluma para escribir algunas cosas que le parecieron notables y que por ir a prisa y no pudo ... alcanzar a escribir lo que hablaba, lo dejó y ... no otra cosa ha escrito de su mano."

visions for her own gain. Melgarejo's family and her fellow *beatas* had begun to suspect her, and thus her status as a good woman was in peril.

The Limits of Spiritual Motherhood:

Since their time with Rosa of Lima, Melgarejo and her fellow *beatas* had been a core part of a larger interest in mysticism in Lima. The Inquisition feared the spread of heresy, and if the elite and powerful were involved in the practice of heterodox mysticism, the potential to lead others astray would only increase.⁶⁶ As the Inquisition put pressure on Melgarejo's spiritual community, it splintered, with some choosing to support their friend and spiritual leader, and others to condemn her.

One of the primary witnesses who testified against Melgarejo was Doña Inés de Velasco. She was a thirty-five-year-old woman of Spanish descent born in Peru, married to Hernando Ropero. Both had been active participants in Melgarejo's spiritual community, regularly attending the meetings at Melgarejo's house. The Inquisition also tried Velasco for having visions and spreading the knowledge of them to others.⁶⁷ Her testimony was lengthy, lasting many weeks. She denounced most of the closest members of their spiritual community, but especially Melgarejo. Velasco's testimony reveals how Melgarejo's spiritual motherhood could, and did, intimidate others around her and how Velasco's personal suspicions and doubts began.

⁶⁶ Historians such as Stephen Epstein and Clifford R. Backman have argued that the Catholic Church, in its efforts to convert peoples, to the true faith, targeted the elites of any given society. Likewise, the Inquisition feared that, if the elite began to believe in heretical mysticism and ideas, the result could be a disastrous return to a pagan, demonic past. Stephen Epstein, *An Economic and Social History of Later Medieval Europe, 1000-1500* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009). Clifford R. Backman, *The Worlds of Medieval Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁶⁷ Proceso de fe de Luisa Melgarejo, images 16–17.

Velasco described during her trial an instance that elucidates how spiritual motherhood could be intimidating when people encountered the supernatural. She had been a regular attendee at the meetings in Melgarejo's home and had participated in several conversations on religious topics and speculations regarding the various raptures and ecstatic trances experienced by the community. One evening, the experience went too far for Velasco. This happened one night in the home of Melgarejo, in the presence of Doña María de Morales, Doña María de Usategui, and their husbands, Gonzalo de la Maza, Doctor de Soto, and Guillermo de Urbane. The gathering began calmly enough with "Doña María and the guests discussing the immaculate conception of the Virgin, when [Melgarejo and Morales] became suspended [i.e., entered an ecstatic trance]." This was common enough among members of the community. Velasco, who was in another room when the trance happened, heard a noise; she then heard Melgarejo "say many things about God." When Velasco entered the room, she found Morales and Melgarejo in a state of commotion; she then heard Melgarejo say she was "out of her mind" (*loca*), which Velasco interpreted as a sign of humility. When asked about the noise she heard, Velasco said it sounded like someone dragged across the floor (*arrostrando por el suelo*), which was made as Melgarejo flew from where she and Morales were sitting in the oratory to the altar. When questioned by the Inquisitors about Melgarjeo's flight, Velasco responded she did not actually see Melgarejo fly, but was told so by Morales.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Ibid., "Audiencia de Doña Inés de Velasco," images, 22–24: "Dijo que se le ha acordado que estando una noche en casa de Doña Luisa de Soto con Doña María de Morales y Doña María de Usategui y sus maridos Gonzalo de la Maza y el Doctor Soto y Pedro de Urbaneja ... la susodicha [?] Doña María de Morales, tratando de la limpísima concepción de la Virgen se quedo está suspendida y luego la dicha Doña Luisa de Soto, y que no se acuerda bien cuál de las dos se suspendió primero. Y que estando esta suspendida oyó ruido y oyó Doña Luisa hablar muchas cosas de Dios. Estando la susodicha suspendida o arrobada y que después la dijo la dicha

This event provides greater insight into Melgarejo, her spiritual motherhood, and her spiritual community. It was common for the members of this community to be sitting and discussing the subjects related to Catholicism. Velasco expected that one or more of the women would enter an ecstatic trance during the gatherings. This had become the norm in this community and defined an important aspect of Melgarejo's spiritual motherhood. Yet it also demonstrates the dangers of displaying spiritual experiences considered extraordinary. While it was not uncommon for the Catholic mystics to experience supernatural "flights," for Velasco this instance was cause for concern.

Describing the incident above, Velasco demonstrated that she did not like or trust what had happened. As the inquisitors interrogated her, she revealed that the sound had frightened her and that it had sounded as if "someone had fallen flat on the floor."⁶⁹ Entering the room, Velasco did not find anyone injured or fallen to the floor, but she heard Morales reporting what she and Melgarejo had experienced during their ecstatic trance. She went on to report that she spoke to her confessor, Juan Villalobos, who told her to "tell her [Melgarejo's] confessor and ... that she

Doña Luisa después de volver ambas en sí, la hermana Inés ha visto [a Doña Luisa decir que era]... loca

--- Preguntando: ¿a quién llamo loca la dicha doña Luisa y por qué? Dijo: que por sí misma lo dijo por haber tenido que el vuelo que esta sintió cuando hacía ruido y estaba suspendida y que le parece que por humildad se llamó loca la dicha Doña Luisa.

--- Preguntando: ¿en qué manera voló la dicha Doña Luisa, y hasta dónde? Dijo: que voló desde donde estaban sentadas en el oratorio hasta el altar del [¿?] que no la vio volar si no que sintió el ruido.

--- Preguntando: si no la vio volar, ¿cómo sabe que voló? Dijo: que porque se lo oyó decir [a] la dicha doña María de Morales.

--- Preguntando: ¿en qué manera fue el ruido que hizo dicha Doña Luisa cuando voló? Dijo: que como de una persona que iba arrojando [sic] por el suelo."

⁶⁹ Ibid., image 24, "Preguntando: ¿en qué manera fue el ruido que hizo dicha Dona Luisa cuando voló? Dijo: que como de una persona que iba arrojando por el suelo."

[Velasco] should stay home and visit nobody anymore.”⁷⁰ This demonstrated at least one instance in which a close member of the community had grown wary of Melgarejo’s spiritual motherhood and directly reported that to Church authorities, first her confessor and then the Inquisition. Thus, there were limits to the supernatural experiences that even the followers of a spiritual mother could accept.

The Jesuits and the Limits of Spiritual Motherhood:

The Jesuits too demonstrated the possibilities, limitations, and gray areas of spiritual motherhood in their testimonies before the Inquisition. In the past, they had legitimated and supported the spiritual community through their close relationship with Melgarejo, recording and editing her visions for dissemination. The Inquisition was most interested in these priests and called three Jesuit priests who had written and edited the various documents pertaining to Melgarejo’s visions. The Inquisition focused on why they had supported Melgarejo and whether they had tried to hide heretical content she had written that might prove that the origins of her visions were not godly. These men were clearly her supporters and often spoke of her in glowing terms, convinced of her virtue and of the divine origin of her visions. They demonstrated that while writing the visions was a potential danger to Melgarejo’s career as a spiritual mother, in their eyes she remained a good woman and thus a true spiritual mother. Despite this conviction of Melgarejo’s spiritual motherhood, their careful editing of her recorded visions led the Inquisition to doubt the orthodoxy of both Melgarejo and her community.

⁷⁰ Ibid., image 19: “le envió a decir a su confesor el cual sabiendo se conciencia y la sinceridad con que esta siempre procede le mandó que se estuviera en su casa y no se metiera en visitar a nadie.”

The inquisitors aimed to discover who had recorded the visions and who had edited them.⁷¹ It became clear that Fathers Contreras and Torres had edited the recorded visions under the direction of Father Martínez.⁷² These men had all supported the effort to transcribe and record Melgarejo's visions over the course of many years because they believed Melgarejo was a good woman. As the Inquisition applied pressure, the priests grudgingly admitted to having edited and corrected the documents, but they would not say why they had made the corrections or what these consisted of, only that they did so when Father Martínez asked or commanded them to do so.⁷³ This shifted the focus of the case from the life and actions of the good woman or *embustera* Melgarejo to the men who had supported her.

In his correspondence with the Suprema, the supreme council of the Inquisition in Madrid, the inquisitor Gaytán of Lima accused the Jesuits and others of attempting to destroy evidence. After the conclusion of Melgarejo's trial, he wrote to the Suprema requesting advice on how to proceed:

We have called those of the Company of Jesus [to testify], because they are the authors of Doña Luisa's actions. Once they were before the tribunal, they defended their actions and doctrine with such tenacity and in such a bellicose manner, that it appeared to us [that] they have expanded these proceedings to such a point as to cause us to ask what the Suprema would order and command us to do.⁷⁴

⁷¹ This is an inference based on the specific questions that the inquisitor consistently asked of these men. Each was asked whether they had written, read, or edited any of the visions.

⁷² *Ibid.*, Padre Contreras, image 53.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, Padre Torres, images 61–63.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, Padre Torres, images 153–154. “nos se han llamado para ello los de la compañía porque son autores de las acciones de la dicha Dona Luisa. y con estaba al Santo Oficio por dicho proceso y porto cara a religión tan belicosa tan tenaz en defender de sus acciones y doctrina, nos ha parecido dilatar el proceder en esta causa hasta que mandadnos la rever la Suprema nos ordene y mande lo que debamos hacer.”

According to Gaytán, Melgarejo was not the central authority of her spiritual community and therefore not ultimately responsible for her actions. This provides a partial explanation of why she was able to keep her status as a good woman and spiritual mother in Lima long after her trial. Her obedience to the priests, crucial in establishing her initial status, shielded her from punishment by the Inquisition. Indeed, the importance of the Jesuits in this case spanned the Atlantic.

The Suprema supported Gaytán's position of placing most of the blame for Melgarejo's activities on the Jesuits. In reviewing the documents collected from various members of the community and the priests, the Suprema determined: "We will proceed against them, her [Melgarejo], and those in her confession [the other *beatas*], and the other religious [the Jesuits]." ⁷⁵ Their reasoning was clear: "We find them guilty of having made amendments and corrections in the notebooks." The Suprema ordered that all the notebooks and other transcriptions of Melgarejo's be confiscated. ⁷⁶ The text goes on to describe how many notebooks were seized and from whom. They also cataloged any obvious corrections (erasure marks or scribbled out words) made to the texts. ⁷⁷ The central focus on the men who supported Melgarejo and who corrected her writings reveals much about the Suprema's priorities and their attitudes toward her. This deliberate targeting of the Jesuits and their editing of the documents provides cogency to Irene Silverblatt's argument that the case around Melgarejo was less about her and more about a struggle between the Inquisition in Lima and Colegio de San Pablo. This animosity

⁷⁵ Ibid., image 158: "Con ella y con los de sus confesiones y otros religiosos resultare se proceda contra los."

⁷⁶ Ibid., image 158: "que resultare culpados en haber hecho los enmiendas y borres en los cuadernos y se recojan los demás traslados."

⁷⁷ Ibid., images 159–160.

only increased once the Suprema issued their conclusions, agreeing with the Liman tribunal that Melgarejo perhaps had only secondary responsibility.⁷⁸

In her analysis of Melgarejo's case as part of a struggle over the control of religious life in Lima, Silverblatt underscored her role as an important mystic but did not consider that the central issue of the case:

But worse, admitted the Inquisitor Andrés Gaytán, she was “commonly revered and thought to be authentic even among those of good judgment.” So, in spite of Luisa Melgarejo's infamy and her challenge to inquisitorial authority, the tribunal had to follow regulations. They had to wait for someone to formally testify before they could begin to collect evidence and pursue an indictment.⁷⁹

Clearly, the Inquisition held the opinion that she threatened Lima and needed to be removed as soon as possible. However, their hands remained tied by the Catholic Church bureaucracy. Also, the support of Melgarejo's spiritual community, which had helped her to wide popularity in Lima (the public, as Gaytán noted, “commonly revered [Melgarejo] and thought [her] to be authentic”), initially insulated her from those who opposed her. The Jesuits' efforts to advance her career and their admiration of the mystic played an essential role in her networks of communication and means by which she gained authority.

This same support became part and parcel of what eventually spelled the end of Melgarejo's spiritual community. For the Jesuits were not a unified group in their purpose or opinions. Though many of them had thrown their support behind Melgarejo as the new leader of the community after Rosa of Lima's death, not all of them did so. Furthermore, the Jesuit's influence and status undermined Melgarejo and her community. As Silverblatt explains,

Melgarejo's case was further complicated by the fact [that] it was a prize in a struggle between powerful institutions. The Jesuits were Melgarejo's greatest devotees, so committed to her saintliness that they were willing to bowdlerize her

⁷⁸ Silverblatt, *Modern Inquisitions*, pp. 55–65.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

fifty-nine journals—containing all manner of visions and prophecies—in order to thwart possible heresy charges. Lima magistrates were at a loss about how to go forward, for the battle for the truth not only involved a *beata* but a very powerful religious order (the Inquisition’s nemesis at the time).⁸⁰

This hostility towards the Jesuits and, through them, Melgarejo slowly built into the initial denunciation by Muñoz in 1622. All of this indicates that the trial, for the Inquisition at least, was not about Melgarejo but, through her, about the Jesuits’ authority.

For the Inquisition, the Jesuits (and Gonzalo de la Maza) were to blame for having collected and edited the documents. In making corrections and amendments to her writings, they knowingly and willingly attempted to protect themselves and her by ensuring that the texts complied with Catholic orthodoxy. In this effort, these men assumed traditional patriarchal roles and declared themselves her benefactors.⁸¹ Thus, blaming the Jesuits for leading her astray saved Melgarejo from punishment by the Inquisition, even if this meant reducing her authority as a spiritual mother and minimizing the leading role she had played in her spiritual community and in the religious life of Lima.

Conclusion: The Model of Catholic Spiritual Motherhood:

Luisa Melgarejo was released from the Inquisition’s prison in 1625, following the suspension of her case and an auto-da-fé that claimed the lives of all the other *beatas* and one nun in her community: Inés de Velasco, Ana María Pérez (*la platera*), Isabel de Ormaza, María de Santo Domingo, and the nun Inés de Ubiarte. Silverblatt has suggested that Melgarejo’s husband managed to secure her release using his influence within the government; however, this

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Jodi Bilinkoff, *Related Lives: Confessors and their Female Penitents* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), pp. 2–6.

possibility does not exclude that living up to the model of spiritual motherhood saved Melgarejo from the fate of her fellow *beatas*; as the inquisitor Gaytán explained, Melgarejo was “commonly revered and thought to be authentic even among those of good judgment.”⁸² Melgarejo had not strayed from the path of a good woman, and this secured her spiritual motherhood until her death in 1651. Spiritual motherhood for Melgarejo, and those who followed her, centered on the concept of the *buena mujer (o cristiana)* (good woman or good Christian woman).

Melgarejo demonstrated the potential for spiritual motherhood and the key to succeeding in that role: establishing oneself as a good woman. At the core of this were expectations of women in the Catholic faith, specifically devotion and obedience. Melgarejo demonstrated that devotion and obedience were multifaceted and hierarchical. The first and most important group whom a successful good woman and spiritual mother had to obey was male church authorities.

Melgarejo established that she would obey her confessors and spiritual fathers in her spiritual career. She obeyed them even over her husband, refusing her husband’s orders to leave the chapel of San Pablo without an order from her confessor. She listened to them and coordinated with them in writing and editing her visions and interpreting her supernatural experiences. This was a key component of what made a woman “good,” since in Spanish Catholicism a good woman would obey the male authorities in her life, who would guide and educate a spiritual mother in her career. Should the spiritual mother have male family members, she was expected to obey them as well, but Melgarejo demonstrated that this could and would be a secondary concern. Obedience to Catholic authorities included the expectation of devotion to

⁸² Silverblatt, *Modern Inquisitions*, p. 67.

faith, family, and community—another key component of a good woman and of spiritual motherhood in general.

Melgarejo closely adhered to a devotional lifestyle. She regularly attended Mass, took communion, and attended confession. She confessed regularly, beyond the usual Easter and Nativity mandatory confessions. In addition, Melgarejo spent many hours of her mornings in the Jesuit chapel at the Colegio de San Pablo, praying and becoming enraptured in the small public space. In the evenings, she learned about and discussed spiritual topics and theology with a group of priests and likeminded individuals. Melgarejo also dedicated herself to a lifestyle of asceticism and humility. She would eat very little, dress simply, engage in fasting, and generally abuse her body in an effort to draw closer to the divine.

One subject that remains a mystery in Melgarejo's case is her sexuality. Sexual purity and intent were considered some of the gravest of issues for famous female mystics, both nuns and laywomen, such as Teresa of Ávila, Lucrecia de León, Catherine of Siena, and others. Sexuality is central to the cases of the other laywomen discussed in the remaining chapters of this dissertation. Lay spiritual mothers took individual vows of chastity, poverty, humility, and so on, as well as the habits of tertiary nuns of religious orders or even those of their own design. Unlike women in a religious order, the only people responsible for ensuring a lay spiritual mother's adherence to her vows of chastity were the spiritual mother and, possibly, her spiritual father or confessor. Nonetheless, lay spiritual mothers were expected to live up to the same ideals of chastity held by the religious orders.

All of the testimonies in favor of Melgarejo ascertained that she lived a chaste life. However, there remains the mystery of the seven years during which she lived in the same house

as Juan de Soto before they married. It appears that their eventual marriage erased any concerns their cohabitation may have raised.

Melgarejo favored the ascetic lifestyle, in contrast to spiritual mothers who focused more on community involvement and education. Melgarejo certainly did educate those around her, particularly Úrsula de Jesús, but she served more as a distant, elite figure who led and educated through example. In other cases of spiritual motherhood, women engaged more directly with their communities building schools and developing programs to educate others in a devotional or religious lifestyle. Regardless, at the core, what made a spiritual mother was an attempt to share her knowledge and understanding with other members of her family and community to improve their lives and draw them closer to the Catholic Church, its beliefs, and its religious practices.

Melgarejo's educational efforts also included reaching out to others by corresponding with them personally and by recording her visions for posterity. Further, Melgarejo amassed a personal library of theological texts and had access to the Jesuit library in the Colegio de San Pablo. Melgarejo embarked frequently on self-education, which she then turned around to share with others in her conversations and correspondence. This pattern existed in most examples of spiritual motherhood but was limited to those who had the time and means to learn to read and write, which typically meant spiritual mothers of elite background.

Another educational aspect of spiritual motherhood came in the form of interpreting the supernatural events that occurred to and around them. Van Deusen has argued that women who received visions, and Melgarejo in particular, acted more as texts upon which God wrote his word, like the tablets of the Ten Commandments. Because they received their visions and filtered them through male Church authorities, van Deusen argues, they acted more as receivers for the

priests' books than as active agents.⁸³ This may be true of the ecstatic trances in which visionaries suspended their senses, but Melgarejo followed up her mystical experiences and visions by discussing them in great detail with priests, friends, and relatives to better understand them and share that understanding with others. This was especially true when a spiritual mother's career involved seeing souls enter or leave Purgatory, or when she received visits from their spirits. Melgarejo provided evidence and advice in the canonization of Rosa of Lima, actively pursuing this goal, and advocating on the would-be saint's behalf throughout the process. This active, rather than passive, role in spiritual interpretation was also true of other spiritual mothers and the communities in which they lived. Spiritual motherhood involved advising and educating on matters both mundane and supernatural to better prepare the women's families and communities for a religious lifestyle.

Manifestations of the supernatural were not the same for every individual but were an essential component for the most influential and noteworthy of the lay spiritual mothers. Melgarejo experienced, raptures, visions, ecstatic trances, and even supernatural flights of the soul. Her experience is one of the gentler of the supernatural manifestations with which spiritual mothers contended. Others, including those discussed in this dissertation, as well as many others such as Inés of Herrera, Lucrecia de León, and Rosa of Lima, experienced apocalyptic prophecies, demonic and angelic visitations, visits from the dead, miracles, demonic possessions, stigmata, and the like.⁸⁴ For supporters, these manifestations of the supernatural showed divine favor; for critics, they were evidence of diabolic influence. The spiritual mothers who experienced them inevitably became the most known and famous/infamous of lay religious

⁸³ Van Deusen, "In So Celestial a Language," pp. 62–82.

⁸⁴ Renée Levine Melammed, *Heretics or Daughters of Israel?: The Crypto-Jewish Women of Castile* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 1–15.

authorities and were the most often discussed and sought-after sources of knowledge and experience, and Melgarejo was certainly one of them. However, scholars such as Moshe Sluhovsky note that encounters with the supernatural also made the careers of mystics and spiritual mothers particularly tenuous and dangerous, especially if they were laypersons. The source of the spirits and visions was immediately suspect, and the dissemination of any revelations or theology by them was a potential danger in the eyes of the Catholic Church and the Spanish Inquisition.⁸⁵ Thus, while a spiritual mother like Melgarejo could work all her life to ground herself in the image of the obedient and devoted good woman, her most influential source of status (divine favor/the supernatural) was also that which most endangered her and her career.

Melgarejo's case demonstrates the broad range of potential dangers and pitfalls in the career of the visionary spiritual mother. To gain this status, and win public support for her visions, a spiritual mother first had to establish herself as a good woman, humble, virtuous, obedient, and devoted to the Catholic faith. Yet encountering the supernatural threatened their status because the good woman and the spiritual mother would not know enough to discern the nature of the visions and spirits she experienced. As Sluhovsky has emphasized, the skill of interpreting spirits, itself considered a divine gift, belonged only to the most devoted and educated of priests.⁸⁶ A spiritual mother was susceptible to the danger of demonic deception and trickery, which could render her a heretical *ilusa* (a deceived woman), unwittingly spreading demonic lies under the guise of the word and will of God. Further, as her fame as a visionary grew and as she wrote (if she could), a spiritual mother was liable to be accused of seeking fame and might be perceived by some as vainglorious or, worse, as one who had been faking it all

⁸⁵ Moshe Sluhovsky, *Believe Not Every Spirit: Possession, Mysticism, and Discernment in Early Modern Catholicism* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2007), pp. 1–13.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 11–25.

along for personal fame, an *embustera* (liar). Melgarejo inevitably was suspected of each of these charges, as was typical of most spiritual mothers. When Melgarejo and others were confronted with doubt and a trial before the Inquisition, the cases themselves usually returned to the question of their original status: Was the spiritual mother a good woman? Had she obeyed competent men? In Melgarejo's case, the answer to both questions, but especially the second, points to a gray area that offered no obvious answers.

When the questions and doubts built to the point that a woman found herself on trial, the issue usually began to revolve around the men who supported or oversaw the spiritual mother. The Inquisition investigated Melgarejo and her status as a good woman but was especially interested in the written accounts of her visions. The central issue lay in the actions of the priests who stood accused of erasing potential heresies from her written works. While it was impossible to prove that there had been heretical content, the Inquisition collected and destroyed her writings, a blow to her career and the priests' reputations. Other spiritual mothers found themselves in similar situations with the priests and men who supported them. Should the male authority prove sexually impure, corrupt, or poorly educated in theology, a spiritual mother's career might collapse as well, regardless of her own actions, as this showed that she could not be as good as some had thought she was, casting doubt on her entire career.

Melgarejo's case lies squarely in a gray area, for while the priests failed her, her husband and the *contador* Gonzalo de la Maza did not. Their good opinions and firm belief in her status as a good woman prevented her from being sentenced and condemned as others were in Lima. Spiritual mothers with similarly dedicated and capable male supporters found themselves facing only limited restrictions or light punishments, as in the case of Melgarejo, whose main punishment was the loss of her writings. Others spiritual mothers who lacked such support might

find themselves exiled or confined inside religious institutions. The least fortunate were condemned to death. Regardless of their ultimate success, all of their careers depended on how these women appeared to fit within the devotional models of Catholicism and how they translated their status as spiritual mothers and good women into the acquisition of influence and authority.

Melgarejo's life and case help to lay out the general landscape of what a good woman was, what a spiritual mother had to do to establish herself as such, and what that status granted her the ability to do. Spiritual motherhood then consisted of becoming "good" through devotion, obedience, faith, and a lifestyle of humility or asceticism. It included nurturing, healing, and supporting the faith and well-being of those around them and their community. As they each established their status as a "good Christian woman," they were then able to spread their knowledge through education, role-modeling, and advice to their communities, however large or small (including communities of writing). For the most noteworthy, this was accompanied by status as a visionary or one who had frequent congress with the supernatural. Spiritual motherhood, particularly that of the visionaries, required a delicate balance of maintaining fame, authority, supernatural interaction, and public presence while at the same time preserving their image as devoted, faithful, humble, and obedient good women.

Chapter 2: Shifting Landscapes of Spiritual Motherhood: Catalina Ballester in the Communal Eye

... power derives from a mandate from the masses, not from some farcical aquatic ceremony.

—Dennis, *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*

Introduction:

The definition of the power that spiritual mothers could wield was grounded in the social mores and expectations of the communities in which they lived and operated. The community determined the appearance and potency of spiritual authority, particularly for women and nuns, in what they defined as socially acceptable dress, spirituality, rhetoric, and belief. Some of the more central potentials and limitations of communal power become apparent when one studies groups of religious working in concert. Specifically, Elizabeth Lehfeldt in *Religious Women in Golden Age Spain* and Mónica Díaz in *Indigenous Writings from the Convent* provide examples of how nuns worked together to exert influence and authority over their communities. These authors demonstrate how convents and female religious orders were essential components of their towns and cities. They provided financial, cultural, and religious support for entire groups and nations, and thus the community worked to meet their needs and avoid their displeasure. Yet the community also pushed back against the power of these women religious, with their own interpretations of the place and power of the convents and the women in them. These authors describe how the communities expected certain conduct and rhetoric rooted in the notions of femininity discussed in the previous chapter, which filtered women religious' power through the male authorities of the Catholic Church and the landed elite. These expectations and limitations

also applied to individuals such as Teresa of Ávila who operated in more elite circles and theological groups.⁸⁷

As Alison Weber has described, this determined how Teresa of Ávila could operate, how and with whom she communicated, and how she eventually defended herself to the Inquisition. Weber described how Teresa of Ávila developed a rhetoric of femininity based in self-deprecating language and deference to male authority, all while engaging in theological and political discourse and achieving great influence over those discourses throughout her lifetime. Further, Teresa of Ávila fell back on this same rhetoric before the Inquisition, and her acquittal established its effectiveness as a defense.⁸⁸ Beyond her rhetoric, Teresa of Ávila lived her femininity in her private and personal life among the nuns and in her relationship to her confessor, the Carmelite priest St. John of the Cross. Jodi Bilinkoff has illustrated how Teresa of Ávila dedicated herself to the oversight of the Catholic Church in her established relationship to her confessor; she discussed and relayed the vast majority of her religious experiences through him, which made her claims and experiences more acceptable to the community.⁸⁹ Thus, the traditions of the convents and individuals within the Catholic Church and the religious orders firmly established communal expectations of what a spiritual mother did, said, and even looked like.

The lay spiritual mothers found themselves in the unique position of being required to meet these same communal expectations of spiritual motherhood and religious authority without

⁸⁷ Elizabeth Leffeldt, *Religious Women in Golden Age Spain: The Permeable Cloister* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), pp. ix-15. Díaz, *Indigenous Writings from the Convent*, pp. 1–25.

⁸⁸ Weber, *Teresa of Ávila and the Rhetoric of Femininity*, pp. 3–17. Weber, *Approaches to Teaching Teresa of Ávila and the Spanish Mystics*, pp. 1–10.

⁸⁹ Bilinkoff, *Related Lives*, pp. 1–12. Jodi Bilinkoff, *The Ávila of Saint Teresa: Religious Reform in a Sixteenth-Century City* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014), pp. 1–20.

the same nets of support, education, and safety provided to those within the Catholic Church. An excellent example of a woman who faced these challenges and demonstrated the flexibility needed to meet the expectations of two vastly different communities is Catalina Ballester of Mallorca, Spain (1629–1660).

The first half of her life and experience took place in a small town (Falaniche) north of the main city on the island, Palma de Mallorca (hereafter “Palma”). Ballester was born to a father who was a *labrador* (a commoner who lived from working the land) and later worked to support herself and her family. No one would have expected a young woman of her station to rise much beyond it. But from a young age, her life was set on a spiritual course. Wealth, community, and public debate define Ballester’s career. Throughout her life and career as a spiritual mother, she behaved in ways demonstrating personal vanity and a desire for wealth, unlike other spiritual mothers. She adapted herself to the roles that best achieved relative wealth and fame in the communities through which she moved and in which she lived. Her life and inquisitorial trial show just how important the community around a spiritual mother could be in determining the shape and scope of her experience.

Ballester demonstrated awareness, discernment, and savvy in her understanding of the expectations of spiritual motherhood, which she employed to further her career and economic standing. In Falaniche, the community expected a hardworking, humble, and trustworthy spiritual mother, and that is what Ballester was. In Palma, her community (at least the merchant and middle classes) expected a woman of refinement and poise, and that is what she attempted to be after she left Falaniche. She worked within the expectations of the communities in which she operated, advancing her own standing and spiritual career, increasing her personal wealth, and providing for her biological family. She adapted to the norms of whatever community she was

in, and if that community approved of her behavior, her career advanced. Ballester's case demonstrates how a woman of relatively little means could use adaptation, awareness, and spiritual motherhood to advance herself, her authority, and her socioeconomic status.

Similarities can be found in the lives and actions of widows who assumed control of their husband's estates and became public economic figures, as long as they conformed to the expectations of their community and the roles for women permitted therein.⁹⁰ This was also true of women of the court, noblewomen, and others of means who used the expectations of their individual communities and societies, and their roles therein, to advance themselves, their families, and their interests.⁹¹ Like spiritual motherhood, these roles and means of women's public power were not only accepted but expected. Spiritual motherhood was but one means for women to advance themselves in their community, but it was most common among the laity and women of the lowest classes. Ballester demonstrated how spiritual mothers of modest origins could advance via the road of spiritual motherhood through understanding their communities well.

All spiritual mothers' authority and status were rooted in their ability to navigate the norms and expectations of their community. Those who did so successfully were lauded and treated as living saints, and those spiritual mothers who failed were derided and cast out. The community could, and did, determine what clothes, what actions, what words, and what lifestyle a spiritual mother should choose. This chapter asks how the communities Ballester interacted

⁹⁰ Marta V. Vicente, *Clothing the Spanish Empire: Families and the Calico Trade in Early Modern Atlantic World* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 1–9.

⁹¹ Magdalena Sánchez, *The Empress, The Queen, and the Nun: Women and Power at the Court of Philip III of Spain* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), pp. 1–25.

with shaped her career, how she navigated them, and what this tells us about other spiritual mothers.

To best understand Ballester's spiritual journey, one must begin with her status before she moved to the capital city of Mallorca, Palma. Ballester was a resident of Palma starting in 1660 but began building her spiritual credentials much earlier in the town of Falaniche, where she married and had a child, Antonio. This chapter will first examine her life in Falaniche, where she dedicated herself to the spiritual path and to mothering more than just her own household. It will then shift to her time in Palma and, finally, will discuss her arrest, trial, and sentencing by the Inquisition. Spiritual motherhood for Ballester was rooted in the roles she perceived would serve her best in her community. While she remained popular and had the support of her confessors, she was able to teach, advise, and care for the souls of her community, both living and dead. Many supported her in Falaniche and in Palma, but Ballester's adaptation, self-promotion, and enrichment violated many people's sense of decency, and for these reasons her career as a spiritual mother ultimately failed.

Ballester in Falaniche, 1629–1660:

Falaniche was a small town, distant from the capital, and the community there expected spiritual mothers to be humble, to dress simply, and to serve the community. It had a parish priest and was visited by itinerant members of the Franciscan order. There was a large divide of socioeconomic status, as evidenced by the number and types of people Ballester worked with (and for). Her life there was simple and one of relative devotion until she began to develop a closer association with the spiritual life. This section will demonstrate how Ballester developed her first understanding of spiritual motherhood in Falaniche and how the community influenced

her outward appearance (clothing and behavior) and her authority (speaking, writing, personal theology). Falaniche's community demanded a simple, humble appearance and hard work from her, as well as an attitude that was deferential to the existing social structures and to the itinerant Franciscan priests.

Ballester was born in 1629 in Falaniche and claimed she was of good "Old Christian" stock (*buena descendida*).⁹² Her early years were uneventful and not particularly spiritual beyond the norm of Catholic society. While in her parents' home she worked, as the child of a modest family would, supporting her mother in the household's chores and caring for her siblings, a sister and a brother.⁹³ This is how she lived until the age of sixteen, when the first great transition of her life occurred: in 1645 she married her husband, Antonio Roig Mayola. Antonio Roig was a weaver of the *labrador* class and had a modest estate with rents around 200 libras, a nontrivial sum that would put them in the lower landed middle class.⁹⁴ She moved into his home and there assumed the roles of wife, mother, and mistress of the household.

Antonio Roig was a pious man and drew Ballester closer to the spiritual life as their marriage progressed. She developed the spiritual aspects of her life more and more. She attended Mass regularly and grew close to her confessor, Juan Suñer, the local parish priest who cared for her soul during her time in Falaniche. In addition, during her years in Falaniche, she encountered several visiting priests, lecturers, and theologians. She met Fray Francisco Marjal, who worked,

⁹² Proceso de fe de Catalina Ballester, AHN, Consejo de la Inquisición, legajo 1707, exp. 10, Andrés Ginard, October 8, 1663, images 18–19, and Catalina Ballester, "audiencia ordinaria," October 6, 1669, image 198. All my references to the original trial documentation are from the images of the digitized document available in PARES.

⁹³ Ibid., "audiencia ordinaria," October 6, 1669, image 200.

⁹⁴ Stephen Haliczer, *Between Exaltation and Infamy: Female Mystics in the Golden Age of Spain*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 106.

for a time, in the rectory of Falaniche.⁹⁵ In addition, she gravitated to the priests of the Dominican and Franciscan orders, who began shaping her life to one of greater virtue and faith.⁹⁶ This faith only continued to grow as her family did.

In November 1647 she gave birth to twins, a boy and a girl, whom she was determined to raise in a devotional lifestyle, as a good Catholic mother should. Both were named for their father, Antonio and Antonia, and were baptized and christened that same month.⁹⁷ Her connection to her son was especially spiritual. With her husband's encouragement, she enthusiastically began instructing him as soon as she could in the spiritual life, hoping that he would one day join a religious order.⁹⁸ This early established pattern of what a Catholic mother was supposed to do for her children is the essence of what made spiritual motherhood possible outside of women's own household. She was to make certain that her son's spiritual health was solid and reliable through example, prayer, and instruction. Her connection with her daughter is far less clear because of Antonia's short life.

The next major events in Ballester's life were tragic and represented a major shift in her financial stability; they drew her further toward the spiritual life. First, in May 1648 her daughter died. Then in September 1649 her husband died, leaving Ballester a semi-impooverished widow with a young son for whom she had to care and provide. She moved in with her sister and her brother-in-law and began "working with her hands" ("trabajando con sus manos").⁹⁹ As Stephen Haliczer has observed, she acquired a variety of skills as a maid (*criada*) and a seamstress and

⁹⁵ Proceso de fe de Catalina Ballester, Fray Francisco Marjal, no date provided, images 29–31.

⁹⁶ Ibid., "audiencia ordinaria," October 6, 1669, image 200.

⁹⁷ Ibid., Magdalena Morlana, November 8, 1669, images 140–141, and Fray Masso, Barcelona, June 30, 1670, images 405–406.

⁹⁸ Ibid., "audiencia voluntaria," May 23, 1670, images 348–350.

⁹⁹ Ibid., Doctor Jaime Vanrell, March 11, 1670, image 334.

shirt maker, skill sets she maintained and practiced throughout her life.¹⁰⁰ She employed these skills throughout Falaniche for a variety of wealthier households, including her confessor Suñer and other priests; she even took on young women of the *labrador* class as students in her craft.¹⁰¹ From her earliest years as a widow, she was a teacher to her family, her son, and the daughters of Falaniche who desired to learn a valuable skill. These activities were enough to support her and her family after her husband's death, but they were time-consuming. Not long afterward, Ballester became a prominent spiritual figure in Falaniche when she began to experience more significant contact with the supernatural, both divine and diabolic.

Her earliest encounters with the supernatural were not what one would consider welcome or positive. Ballester and her sister shared a bed. Beginning in 1651, Ballester began to experience the first of the demonic attacks that would plague her sleeping hours almost nightly for the rest of her life. Ballester and her sister both reported how she would experience “golpes del demonio” (blows from a demon) while she slept. She would move as if struck by a powerful blow, and she bore the marks of the attacks for days afterward (presumably scratches and bruises). These attacks were discussed openly and frequently among the people of Falaniche and were met with some trepidation, which Ballester partially assuaged through piety, her status as a visionary, and service.¹⁰²

In 1652 she made a move to match more closely her community's expectations of how a spiritual mother would dress, act, and behave: she adopted the tertiary habit of the Franciscans, the largest order in Falaniche, and dedicated herself to acts of spirituality and religious devotion that were intimately connected with the feminine and the home. She worked hard for herself, her

¹⁰⁰ Haliczzer, *Between Exaltation and Infamy*, p. 106.

¹⁰¹ Proceso de fe de Catalina Ballester, “audiencia ordinaria,” October 6, 1669, image 200.

¹⁰² Proceso de fe de Catalina Ballester, Magdalena Morlana, October 26, 1669, image 137.

son, her sister's family, her students, and her clientele. Her neighbors and the priests of Falaniche reported that she worked hard and long trying to make the lives of those around her better. Her work ethic and dedication to piety were considered something supernatural.¹⁰³ Her sister, Margarita Binemelis, described how Ballester once worked at her table all Saturday without stopping. If anyone spoke to her during that time, "she would only smile." From the beginning of her time as a public spiritual figure, Ballester's actions were tied to her work as a mender and seamstress for various households. The work that Ballester finished when in these industrious trances became collectibles among the people of Falaniche, as they were associated with the industriousness and faith that they expected of a spiritual mother in a state of divine favor.

The community image of Ballester as a humble, hardworking spiritual mother only increased as rumors and associations grew around her and her actions. It was commonly said that she could work so efficiently during her trances because she was working alongside the spirit of Catherine of Siena. Haliczzer also observed that this belief caused some members of the community to keep the various mended sheets and crafted clothing "como reliquias" (as relics).¹⁰⁴ These rumors fueled the shirts' popularity, and this demonstrates that the community expected God and saints like Catherine of Siena to look favorably on this form of piety. Another event (or rumor) that fueled community interest and expectations came later, in the form of a miracle.

Around the year 1653, a woman of Falaniche fell gravely sick, and it appeared likely that she would die. Ballester brought an offer of fruit that she "had received from God."¹⁰⁵ The

¹⁰³ Ibid., Margarita Binemelis, October 1669, image 39, "... cuando alguien habla con ella durante este tiempo ella solo sonreía, y las personas que visten dicen que es cosa sobrenatural."

¹⁰⁴ Haliczzer, *Between Exaltation and Infamy*, p. 186.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

woman consumed one of the fruits and was healed overnight, becoming healthier than she had been in a long time. Once again, Ballester's miraculous act was lauded by those in Falaniche, so much so that the women of the village collected the rest of the fruit and kept them as relics as well. Indeed, the community of Falaniche, witnessing these acts, described them using words associated with spiritual motherhood: *holy*, *virtuous*, *miraculous*, and so on.¹⁰⁶ The community had come to expect that a spiritual mother like Ballester would also perform acts of healing like those traditionally associated with women, mothers, and female religious. Ballester worked fervently to care for and clothe the people of Falaniche, and thus gained status in the community, just like the nuns described by Lehfeldt and Díaz, who served communities in Valladolid and Mexico City.

Ballester's experiences with the supernatural continued to develop during her time in Falaniche. In addition to demonic attacks in the night, she began to "see angels" (*veía ángeles*) and experience "times of rapture" (*raptos*) and "immobility" (*inmovilidades*) during the night and the day.¹⁰⁷ Her sister and the priest who came to help remembered clearly several occasions when Ballester was found in their room completely immobile, with hands as immovable as iron that two strong men could not move ("manos de hierro que dos hombres con mucha fuerza no podían mover").¹⁰⁸ Fray Francisco Marjal reported that many people were discussing Ballester's life in great detail and that many religious orders had become involved, including the Augustinians.¹⁰⁹ The public reported to them (and to each other) how Ballester often appeared injured in public, which was understood to be a result of the demonic *golpes*. By 1655 her

¹⁰⁶ Proceso de fe de Catalina Ballester, Fray Francisco Marjal, no date provided, images 29–30.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., Magdalena Morlana, image 137.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., Fray Masso, June 30, 1670, image 404.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., Fray Francisco Marjal, "calificador de este Santo oficio del convento de San Francisco," no date provided, images 29–31.

battered appearance became normalized and expected of the spiritual mother of Falaniche, but only to the degree that she could endure. One witness, Francisco Alguay, reported that he saw her one day looking particularly unwell, and the next day “[se] había curado por milagro” (she had miraculously healed).¹¹⁰

Along with these outward signs of piety and saintliness (behavior, dress, miracles, visions, supernatural visitations), she was also expected to have the inward qualities of a spiritual mother (discourse and guidance from the Catholic Church, as well as impeccable virtue). She worked through this initial phase of her experiences and her budding spiritual motherhood with Juan Suñer, her confessor, and Fray Francisco Marjal, her spiritual guide. This provided her with some support from the Catholic Church and also met the community’s expectations of what a spiritual mother would do. This was the status quo at the time when Ballester experienced a public and distressing event that remained in the town’s memory for years afterward.

In the early months of 1656, she was collecting water from a well in town. Witnesses reported that she had fallen and remained “arrobada en el pozo” (outside her senses in the well).¹¹¹ Several men and women arrived and attempted to help her. All the witnesses there reported that they could not reach her, because she was “atrapada por demonios” (trapped by demons).¹¹² While the exact nature of the trap is unclear from their reports, the witnesses all agreed that something supernatural had occurred. She did not drown and survived her tumble into the well “por la gracia de Dios” (by the grace of God).¹¹³ This event sparked great debate in

¹¹⁰ Ibid., Francisco Alguay (from Falaniche), February 16, 1670, image 233.

¹¹¹ Ibid., Juan Suñer, “vicario de la iglesia parroquial de la villa de Falaniche,” image 223.

¹¹² Ibid., Margarita Binemelis, “mujer de Gabriel Proen de la villa de Falaniche,” February 6, 1670, image 224.

¹¹³ Ibid., Juan Suñer, image 223.

the town. Witnesses to the event reported decades later that many people “comunicaban y publicaban muchas las cosas sobredichas” (communicated and made public many things about the said events).¹¹⁴ After this very public demonic attack, Ballester decided to proceed with even more determination with her role as a spiritual figure. To do so, she sought aid from additional theological experts.

Considering the growing intensity of her experiences, Suñer and Ballester sought the aid of a theologian who was to be her greatest supporter and guide in the following years. Following the incident in the well, she was introduced to Doctor Don Bautista Fuster (hereafter “Fuster”), canon of the cathedral in Palma. Fuster took over the role of Ballester’s spiritual guide whenever he visited Falaniche. He served occasionally as her confessor as well, although his duties in Palma prohibited him from dedicating the necessary level of attention to this task.¹¹⁵ From the very beginning of their relationship, Fuster was impressed with Ballester’s piety and dedication to the Catholic faith.

Fuster prescribed acts of penance that included regular confession and the sacrament of communion as well as a strict regimen of prayer and fasting to help her defend herself against demonic attack.¹¹⁶ The frequency and severity of the “golpes de[l] demonio” meant that Ballester was frequently ill and unable to attend confession daily and take communion, while she continued to struggle to provide for herself, her son, and her sister’s family. At times she skipped communion and prayer in favor of the work and sleep necessary to support herself and her family.¹¹⁷ However, even though she did not fully follow the orders of Fuster, the priest held her

¹¹⁴ Ibid., Margarita Binemelis, February 6, 1670, image 224.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., “audiencia ordinaria,” October 6, 1669, images 200–201, and Haliczzer, *Between Exaltation and Infamy*, p. 74.

¹¹⁶ Proceso de fe de Catalina Ballester, Magdalena Morlana, October 26, 1669, images 138–139.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., Catalina Morlana, August 26, 1666, images 66–67.

in great esteem, particularly because he believed she was obedient as often as she was able. Her sister and others noted that Fuster was pleased by Ballester's level of commitment and obedience (*obediencia*) to the rest of his commands (*mandatos*).¹¹⁸ He was so impressed that he asked some of his colleagues from Palma to meet, visit, and engage with her when he could not.

From 1656 onward, Fuster introduced Ballester to a growing network of priests and theologians, who became her most active community and influence. Among the first, and the most significant, were Doctor Anglada (his first name is not indicated) and Doctor Jaime Vanrell of the Carmelites. They were initially as impressed with her piety and devotion as Fuster was. Over the course of the next four years, they met with her in Falaniche on several occasions. Until 1660 these three men made up the core of her religious support network and guided her as she expanded her own understanding of her religious role in Falaniche and later Palma.¹¹⁹ These priests expected her to do what they prescribed for her spiritual development and health and were impressed when she was able to meet their expectations, which differed from the expectations in Falaniche.

The new expectations included personal vows of chastity and obedience to the faith, as well as cutting her hair short. Further, the priests from Palma encouraged her to continue with her son Antonio's preparation for the priesthood. Functioning both as a traditional and as a spiritual mother, Ballester had her young son introduced to the Franciscan Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mercy as a *religioso* (male religious).¹²⁰ Her decision to keep the young Antonio in a religious life was looked upon with favor in Falaniche, as witnesses described him as

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, Magdalena Morlana, October 26, 1669, images 138–139.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Catalina Ballester, October 6, 1669, image 201.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, Magdalena Morlana, November 8, 1669, image 140.

“perfecto en su oración, obediencia, y comportamiento” (perfect in his oration, obedience, and behavior).¹²¹ This good behavior and her own gifts drew others to the religious lifestyle. It was not long before Ballester was commonly referred to as “the Beata of Falaniche.” Witnesses and her family described how Ballester became a popular figure in Falaniche in 1656–1659. Many spoke of how they saw Ballester “anda[r] por las calles en ropa blanca” (walk through the streets in white clothing) conducting acts of charity and healing.¹²² In this way she fulfilled her community’s expectations of her as a spiritual mother.

Her healing power also won her support in Falaniche. Witnesses described how the torments and *golpes* that beset Ballester’s body could not keep her down. In particular, her sister described one day when Ballester awoke “apareciendo muy mal” (appearing ill) and demanded to go to Mass even though she stumbled through the streets.¹²³ After the sermon, Ballester appeared “muy sana” (quite healthy), which was interpreted as “una cosa milagrosa” (a miraculous thing).¹²⁴ Ballester was also able to heal others. The sick and tired would touch her clothing and be healed.¹²⁵ Her supporters took these acts to be miracles and evidence of divine favor worthy of the Beata of Falaniche. Yet, as was common for spiritual mothers, her community had doubts, typically rooted in the expectations of religious humility and behavior.

Several witnesses described her actions and piety as “faked” and claimed that Ballester had made up the seemingly miraculous healings for her own benefit. Some claimed that Ballester asked healthy members of the community to appear ill or injured so that she might “heal”

¹²¹ Ibid., Fray Masso, Barcelona, June 30, 1670, images 405–406.

¹²² Ibid., Catalina Morlana, October 28, 1666, image 80.

¹²³ Ibid., Magdalena Morlana, October 26, 1669, images 137–138.

¹²⁴ Ibid., images 137–138, 143.

¹²⁵ Ibid., October 26, 1669, image 137.

them.¹²⁶ Others saw her decision to walk around Falaniche in all-white clothing as evidence of *vanagloria* (vainglory) and desire to become known as the Beata of Falaniche.¹²⁷ These detractors saw her acts of piety as efforts to capitalize on her status as a well-known *criada* and seamstress.¹²⁸ Some believed that she did these acts of piety to gain fame and support from the community and keep herself and her son fed and housed. When Ballester began to speak about her spiritual experiences and care for those around her in the community of Falaniche, she became subject to the kinds of conflicting opinions that swirled around many other spiritual mothers. The ever-changing landscape of community expectations and support eventually resulted in conflict, initiating her transition from the poor humble Beata of Falaniche to a spiritual mother in Palma.

In 1659 Ballester was accused of stealing a *sábana* (sheet) that she had been mending from the family of Tomás Timoner. She denied it, and a great deal of debate ensued. The Augustinians searched her home to find the sheet and prove her guilt but discovered nothing.¹²⁹ The pent-up doubt of those who disliked her lifestyle and her stories poured forth. Before long, Ballester found herself accused of also stealing from the alms she collected for charity and keeping a portion for herself and her son and of having priests sneaking into her home for lascivious acts in the night. Witnesses described how *amenazas* (threats) built around her.¹³⁰ The *vicario* (vicar) of Falaniche decided to expel her from Falaniche and as a Franciscan tertiary.¹³¹

¹²⁶ Ibid., Doctor Gano Binemelis, February 20, 1665, images 24–25.

¹²⁷ Ibid., Doctor Gano Binemelis, February 20, 1665, image 22. Catalina Morlana, image 87.

¹²⁸ Ibid., Catalina Morlana, August, 6, 1666, image 40.

¹²⁹ Ibid., Juan Suñer, vecino de Falaniche, no date provided, image 227.

¹³⁰ Ibid., Juan Suñer, October 17, 1663, image 21.

¹³¹ Ibid.

This was the turning point of Ballester's religious position in Falaniche. Accusations of financial improprieties would persist in the years to come.

Scholars have noted that many of the issues, debates, and conflicts that surrounded women's authority, be it religious or secular, centered on the perception that they had overstepped community expectations. Widows in Barcelona could run whole networks of business, the traditional province of men. Lay and religious women dedicated to a spiritual life could be public figures of praise and authority. Whole convents in Valladolid could leverage their piety for power, and young women like Rosa of Lima could alter an entire viceroyalty's understanding of piety. Their problems often arose when the community perceived these women's actions and behaviors to be self-enriching, self-aggrandizing, and vainglorious.¹³² In short, if it was believed that the women were supporting their families and community rather than themselves, they were accepted. This was also true of spiritual motherhood.

The community had spoken against Ballester. Up until 1659 and the accusation of theft, she had lived within the bounds of the community's expectations. Her initial devotion to hard work and piety had earned their support. The miracles of healing and the evidence of her abuse at demonic hands had garnered their sympathies. She had gained the support of the priests, who admired her piety and obedience, expectations they held of spiritual mothers. Doubts began to emerge as Ballester's behavior became more pronounced. She stood out in the streets owing to her white clothes and tertiary habit. She collected charitable contributions, healed the sick, and acted as a public model of devotion. Doubts and conflict found their roots in the belief that she had transitioned from a modest, hardworking educator and healer to a woman who was

¹³² Vicente, *Clothing the Spanish Empire*, pp. 115–123. Lehfeldt, *Religious Women in Golden Age Spain*, pp. 8–30.

vainglorious. That they could not accept. Ultimately, how others perceived her and thus her status would continue to change as she moved to Palma.

Ballester in Palma, 1660–1670:

From the very outset of her time in Palma, Ballester used her connections with religious organizations to establish her position as a spiritual mother in her new community. When she first arrived in the city in 1660, she went to Doctor Anglada to ask him for advice. In response, Anglada took her to the convents of the Dominicans and Franciscans in the city and introduced her to the men with whom she would interact throughout her time in Palma and who would in turn introduce her to the broader community.¹³³ In her first months and years in the city, she supported herself and her son by working for the priests as a *criada* and *tejedora* (weaver), as she had in Falaniche.

Her initial supporters in Palma were Anglada and Fuster. From 1660 to 1662, Anglada would serve as Ballester's confessor, while Fuster continued as her spiritual guide. Living in Palma with the support of these priests, she would interact with more than a dozen priests; they had conversations with her and occasionally took her confession. These men were mostly secular priests, though several belonged to religious orders.¹³⁴ While these would be the essential patterns of her time in Palma, in 1660 her immediate issue was finding a place for herself and her son to live. Fuster, together with Anglada, decided that she should live with the women known as "the Morlanas."

¹³³ Proceso de fe de Catalina Ballester, "audiencia ordinaria," October 6, 1669, image 199.

¹³⁴ Ibid., "audiencia ordinaria," October 6, 1669, images 199–201.

Ballester and the Morlanas:

The Morlanas represented the new class and community of people with whom Ballester would interact. Magdalena and Catalina Morlana were widowed sisters from the mercantile elite of Palma who had taken religious vows and lived as *beatas* with their niece.¹³⁵ They wore the habit of the Carmelites, which Ballester adopted as well.¹³⁶ Ballester used this as one of the first outward signs that she had joined this new community.

Ballester slept with the women of the house in a joint room. The Morlanas reported that she did this because of the “attacks of the demons” (*golpes*) and “ecstatic trances” that beset her; having other women nearby made her feel safer and more secure while she slept.¹³⁷ Her nighttime and resting behaviors were almost identical to those she had experienced in Falaniche. Yet in Palma several events and visions occurred that shed light on Ballester’s private spiritual motherhood and her home life with the Morlanas.

Ballester from the first moments of her association with the Morlanas made clear to them her religious intentions and credentials, demonstrating herself to be someone whom they should support. The Morlanas reported one of the more striking discussions Ballester had with them about her visions. One day in 1660, Ballester saw Jesus the Christ. He held out to her two objects, “a crown of thorns and a crown of flowers,” telling her to choose one and thus her path in this life.¹³⁸ Ballester told the sisters that she had chosen the crown of thorns and that this meant she would gain many “trabajos” (tasks/trials/labors).¹³⁹ This demonstrated to her new

¹³⁵ Haliczzer, *Between Exaltation and Infamy*, p. 74.

¹³⁶ Proceso de fe de Catalina Ballester, Catalina Morlana, August 27, 1666, image 34.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, Catalina Morlana, August 26, 1666, image 33: “una corona de espinas y otra de flores y dice elegir.”

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*: “que significaba que había de pasar muchos trabajos.”

“sisters” how she intended to live her life, and it showed that Jesus himself had presented her with the two paths. The Morlanas said that they found this to be evidence that she was a “buena cristiana” (good Christian) and “virtuosa” (virtuous).¹⁴⁰ She continued to relate visions to the two sisters that demonstrated the depth of her connection to God, her devotion, and her role as a spiritual mother.

Ballester continued to establish her reputation and credentials among the Morlanas and priests who were her initial community in Palma. She related to them a vision she had one evening in 1661: she spoke with Jesus, who gave her “un anillo de piedra blanca” (a ring of white stone) that she was to wear on her left hand.¹⁴¹ Ballester discussed this with her confessors, Fuster and Anglada, who decided to “experimentar si era cierto” (to test if it were true). They told her that it was in fact on her hand, though invisible to all those without God’s permission to see it. Moreover, it was “un anillo de los santos” (a ring of the saints). Based on the interpretation of her confessors, Ballester believed that she had been chosen to be a saint.

Ballester also performed acts like those that had made her famous in Falaniche. At times the Morlanas and the other women of the house would find Ballester lying on the floor completely immobile and impossible to move, as though struck with rigor mortis. They reported, “A veces Catalina Ballester sigue con brazos cruzados, boca arriba, y un pie encima de otro. [Mi] hermana y yo no podía[mos] mover ningún brazo si intentamos.” (At times Ballester would lie, arms crossed, mouth up, with one foot on top of the other. My sister and I were unable to move

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., Catalina Morlana, August 26, 1666, image 31.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., Magdalena Morlana, Calificador, “Audiencia de la Acusación,” March 13, 1670, image 257.

either arm if we tried.)¹⁴² These events were almost a weekly occurrence in the Morlana household and made an impression on those who lived with her.

Ballester explained to the women that these trances happened when she was receiving visions, or had received visions, from God. On one of these occasions, she lay on the floor for hours as though dead. When she awoke, she told her spiritual family that “ha[n] aparecido dos niños hermosísimos con una toalla blanquísima sobremanera, y muy delgada, y hermosa; y con ella la ciñeron tan fuerte y estrechamente que vino a caer en tierra como muerta, y que estaba allí por algunas horas amortecida” (two most beautiful children appeared with an unusually white towel, very thin and beautiful; and they wrapped it around her with such force and so tightly that she was knocked to the ground and lay there for hours as though dead).¹⁴³ Catalina Morlana described this behavior and Ballester as “unusual” or “strange” (*raro* or *rara*). Ballester and her experiences quickly became the subject of debate in the household among the sisters, their niece, and guests who sometimes attended them.

On Christmas Eve in 1663, Ballester was in bed at the home of the Morlanas. In the presence of the two sisters and their niece, Catalina presented Ballester with a figure of the baby Jesus. At first, Ballester seemed startled, and the figure would have fallen had Catalina not caught it in time. Ballester then fell in a state of ecstasy (*se quedó fuera de sí*), during which she began to lift her arms and hands up high, as if she were receiving something; she then lowered her hands to her chest, looking “as if she were rejoiced” by what she held in her arms. Ballester remained like this for about a quarter of an hour. After making additional gestures as if adoring

¹⁴² Ibid., Catalina Morlana, August 27, 1666, image 33.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

Jesus in her arms, she woke up.¹⁴⁴ Magdalena and Juana Terrasa then said that the baby Jesus must have left. Catalina reported that, after this incident, Ballester said she did not want to see any more the figure of the baby Jesus, which she now considered ugly—presumably compared to the actual baby Jesus she had held in her arms.

Those watching such incidents immediately began assessing the acceptability of such behavior for a spiritual mother. For some, what happened showed that Ballester was *santa* and *virtuosa*, but others thought she must be suffering from some illness or malady.¹⁴⁵ These events, and in particular the vision of Christmas Eve, impressed those who saw them. Juana Terrasa, the Morlanas' niece, found them “temerosa” (frightening); in others, they inspired greater respect for Ballester.¹⁴⁶ Skeptics thought they were wicked acts (*maldades*) or “acciones de l[a] mente” (literally, actions of the mind).¹⁴⁷ From the outset of her time in Palma, Ballester's behavior at home was sensational and, ultimately, divisive. Her behavior became even more controversial once the broader community began to witness it and interact with her.

Ballester would walk through the streets of Palma with the Morlanas and their niece and various priests. She once again donned all-white clothing to represent her purity and dedication to the religious life.¹⁴⁸ She gathered alms and offered healing and support to members of the community. These behaviors were typical of many of those who led religious lives. What is noteworthy is that while Ballester continued to interact with poorer members of the community,

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., Catalina Morlana, November 29, 1666, image 101: “...el niño Jesús en las manos de esta, y la dicha Mayola [Ballester] iba levantando sus brazos y manos en alto como que recibía algo en ellos y luego poco a poco fue aplicando las manos a su pecho como que se regalaba con aquello

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., Pedro de Fuenbuena, letters, image 115; Juana Morlana, 1666, image 72.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., Juana Terrasa, May 28, 1670, images 557–560.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., Catalina Morlana, image 33; Jaime Vanrell, May 13, 1670, image 334.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., Catalina Morlana, November 2, 1666, image 89.

at times while in the company of the Morlanas and priests. Whereas in Falaniche she had spent most of her time with the poor, and less with the middle-elite priests and households, in Palma this was reversed. This would at times cause friction because Ballester was still shifting her understanding of community expectations, and her ways of fulfilling them, from what she had experienced in Falaniche. This was particularly clear in one instance when she attempted to care for the poor she met in the streets.

One day in 1663, she was walking the streets of Palma in the company of the Morlanas, when she encountered a poor servant (“*criada pobre*”) surrounded by her children. Inspired with religious fervor, Ballester in that very moment made a charitable donation (“*limosna*”) of the shirt she was wearing so that the woman would have better clothing, for the *criada*’s was worn and of poor quality, offering to give more shirts to the children once she had made them. Recall that Ballester had been a noted shirt maker in Falaniche, and some there kept her shirts as relics. Thus, this gift may have had more significance for her than for those who witnessed the action.¹⁴⁹ After giving away her shirt, she continued her journey through the city and back to her home in her underclothes. This activity spiked immediate discussion about its propriety for an upright Christian woman.

Magdalena Morlana was the first to question why Ballester would “*desnudarse*” (disrobe/became naked) in the public streets in order to be charitable.¹⁵⁰ In response, Ballester claimed that it was the appropriate thing to do, as in Jesus’s parable of the woman who gave all

¹⁴⁹ Haliczzer, *Between Exaltation and Infamy*, p. 75.

¹⁵⁰ Proceso de fe de Catalina Ballester, Magdalena Morlana, December 5, 1669, image 146.

she had in charity.¹⁵¹ This explanation convinced those who most wished to see in Ballester's actions signs of religious fervor.

Indeed, supporters saw this act as further evidence that Ballester was devoted to the spiritual path and that she was a "virtuous woman"; many called her a "saint" or "saintly."¹⁵² The Franciscan Fray Andrés Ginard thought that Ballester was "virtuosa, temerosa de Dios, y vive así de su voluntad" (virtuous, God-fearing, and lived that way by choice).¹⁵³ Thus, those who believed that Ballester was a true visionary and doing her best for the community believed in these acts, which supported their image of Ballester, and they embraced her role as a public force in the streets of Palma. Yet this was not the attitude of the entire community, which demonstrates that she had not fully adjusted to the expectations of the new community in which she found herself.

In contrast to Ballester's supporters, Catalina Morlana described her donation of her shirt as "un escándalo" (a scandal); others saw it as an act "sin virtud" (without virtue).¹⁵⁴ The Franciscan Fray Antonio Petro thought this act was evidence that Ballester "no podría ser santa" (could not become a saint/saintly).¹⁵⁵ Fuster reacted strongly against those who spoke against Ballester, saying that all who claimed such things were "pecadores y sufrirían las penas del Purgatorio" (were sinners who would suffer the pains of Purgatory).¹⁵⁶ This support from a priest prevented the community debate about Ballester from boiling over in 1663 to the point of

¹⁵¹ Ibid., and Catalina Morlana, November 7, 1666, image 73: "la mujer en el cuento de Cristo."

¹⁵² Ibid., Catalina Morlana, December, 1666, images 92–93. In this interview Catalina Morlana, the subject's greatest detractor, described the reactions of her confessor and Catalina Ballester's.

¹⁵³ Ibid., Fray Andrés Ginard, images 18–19.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., Catalina Morlana, October, 22, 1666, image 73, and Fray Antonio Petro, "religioso del convento de San Francisco," October 13, 1663, images 16-17.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., Fray Antonio Petro, October 13, 1663, images 16-17.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., Catalina Morlana, October 1, 1666, image 44, and Haliczzer, *Between Exaltation and Infamy*, p. 75.

eroding her position. Cracks in community opinion would later be her undoing, and this early episode already demonstrated some of the actions and character traits that were not saintly in the opinions of some. It also showed that Ballester had not yet adjusted to the expectations of behavior and virtue held by some in her new community.

In 1660–1663 strains began to show in the Morlana household. Juana Terrassa moved out of the Morlanas' home. In 1663 Ballester removed her Carmelite habit and adopted that of the order of Saint Francis of Paola.¹⁵⁷ The cracks only widened as Ballester continued to expand her network of contacts on spiritual matters outside her immediate family group into the priesthood of Palma. On several occasions, most often in the presence of the priests, she communicated directly with spirits, supernatural entities, and God himself. These represented an important area that bridged experiences she had at home and experiences with the priests who supported her.

Ballester and the Priests of Palma:

During the years 1660 to 1668, Ballester ingratiated and integrated herself into the community of lay priests and the Franciscans of Palma. This community was her bedrock, and the way she interacted with them was far different from how she interacted with the community in the streets or the household of the Morlanas. Herein, her spiritual motherhood performed more as a conduit of God's word, for she was merely a means by which the priests communicated with the otherworldly. Yet, in the general discussions they had afterward as well as in the *coloquios* (conversations) she had with God, she played a far more active role, offering her own opinion and interpretation of the contact. However, while, these represented an opportunity to further explore her spiritual prowess, it was also the close personal connections and private interactions

¹⁵⁷ Proceso de fe de Catalina Ballester, Catalina Morlana, October, 1669, image 200.

with members of the clergy also aroused suspicions about a key virtue, sexual purity. Despite these suspicions and rumors, her relationships with the priests elevated her standing throughout the community, including her socioeconomic status.

Beginning in 1663, Ballester experienced a new and interesting divine gift: colloquia with God. Depending on the nature of the individual colloquium, this was, at times, a private discussion of religious and spiritual matters between her and the priests who believed in her visions and actions. At other times, when together with the priests, she would become entranced and enter into a one-on-one “repartee” with God himself that the priests recorded. And sometimes Ballester served as a conduit to the supernatural for the priests, who would ask her questions, which she did not always remember after returning to her senses after being “arrobada” (enraptured). While from the descriptions of these interactions it sounds as though she served as a spiritual conduit to her community, as was typical of the most potent spiritual mothers, this served only a small portion of Palma itself.

These events were not public, with most occurring within the closed walls of her home or the local church. Also, most of the actual content of the conversations went unrecorded, but they were certainly discussed openly. Catalina Morlana, Pedro de Fuenbuena, Magdalena Morlana, and others, as well as Ballester herself, reported the first manifestation of her “coloquios con Dios” (conversations with God). The first of these occurred on nights when she was beset by demons and, apparently, communicated with her tormentors and with other spirits. Many wondered what exactly was said, and many wondered what spirits (human, demonic, angelic, etc.) Ballester spoke with specifically.¹⁵⁸ Thus, as before when she first found herself beset by

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., Catalina Morlana, November 15, 1666, image 96.

demons, she sought out experts and consulted the priests around her upon encountering this latest manifestation of her spiritual gifts.

Fray Pedro de Fuenbuena became the center of these efforts as he was the most frequent person to host the small gatherings of priests and Ballester in the convent over which he presided. The most frequent attendees were Fuenbuena, Vanrell, and Anglada, though there were times when more or fewer were present, depending on who might be visiting during that time and who was invited.¹⁵⁹ Most often these were discussions of religious matters, specifically related to Ballester's visions, demonic attacks, and the various spirits she had seen or with whom she had spoken. The intent of these meetings was to allow her a chance to relate her experiences and to gain informed insight into her religious experiences. The priests asked her questions about her torments and experiences and would offer what council they could. Further, they would record the times when she entered an ecstatic trance and appeared to commune with God or other spirits.¹⁶⁰ These meetings represented another gray area; her supporters and doubters (some even among the priests, her staunchest supporters) differed in how they spoke of them and how they reacted to seeing her raptures and colloquia with spirits.

The priests who believed in her demonstrated that support directly. Anglada of the Dominicans believed her visions were real and recorded what was said and what he saw during the small gatherings he attended. Magdalena Morlana reported that Frays Anglada and Fuenbuena came to the colloquia events specifically to record them, "porque Dios lo mandaba para ayudar y escuchar a su hermana [Catalina Ballester]" (because God commanded it to help

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., Catalina Morlana, November 9–11, 1666, images 90–91.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., Doctor Jaime Vanrell, March 11, 1670, image 337.

and listen to their sister).¹⁶¹ This was the core reason the priests often returned to help Ballester.¹⁶² They came to help and listen to her and record her visions for investigation and dissemination among those in their community.¹⁶³ The nature of the spirits who spoke to Ballester, and to whom she spoke, was the essential dividing point in how the various priests interpreted these events.

One witness, Doctor Vanrell, represented a middle ground between full support and absolute doubt. Upon attending one of these colloquia, he reported that Ballester “hablaba con algún espíritu” (spoke with some spirit) and that she did not know “con quien” (with whom).¹⁶⁴ Vanrell “no creyese aquellas cosas” (did not believe those things).¹⁶⁵ Vanrell does not make it clear whether he doubted her veracity, or the nature of the spirits in question, or what was said and recorded. Yet this is set against the way he described Ballester herself.

Vanrell contrasted his doubts over the colloquia with his opinion of her virtue. He described her as a woman “que tenía obediencia muy singular a sus confesores” (who had very singular obedience to her confessors) and noted that on several occasions she went to church or went home “por miedo de reprimir de su confesor” (for fear of reprimand from her confessor), describing her as a “mujer con virtud impecable” (woman with impeccable virtue).¹⁶⁶ He even provides evidence of why he believed her to be a virtuous and obedient woman, stating that he and his fellow priests knew this to be true because “hemos visto para apoyar nuestras opiniones, su [Ballester’s] penitencia, oración, limosna, y visiones” (we have seen, to support our opinions,

¹⁶¹ Ibid., Magdalena Morlana, October 26, 1669, image 139.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., Doctor Jaime Vanrell, March 11, 1670, image 337.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., images 335–336.

her penitence, prayer, alms, and visions).¹⁶⁷ While Vanrell doubted the colloquia and Ballester's performance there, the rest of his opinion demonstrates that he believed in her virtue and her actions, even her visions. Clearly, there was some divide in the community about the colloquia as an inward manifestation of faith, theology, and spirituality, but her outward piety and acts of charity in the community were still supported. The colloquia's acceptability grew murkier as more and more individuals became involved in them.

One witness, the Franciscan Fray Masso, reported that some priests visited Ballester or attended the private gatherings of the priests because of these colloquia and at times the requested to speak to her privately. Her immediate community noted that many visiting priests "pedían su consultas sobre cosas espirituales y que causa mucha admiración en las personas que pedían" (asked to consult with her on spiritual matters, and it causes great admiration among the people who asked).¹⁶⁸ Fray Masso reported a specific occasion in 1664 when a priest "pedía comunicarla sola" (asked to speak to her alone) following a colloquium.¹⁶⁹ This apparently was on the border of acceptable behavior, as Masso made a point of noting that nothing scandalous had occurred. He stated that their conversation occurred just out of earshot and that he could see them the whole time.¹⁷⁰ So while this once again skirted the bounds of acceptability to the community, it had its place and demonstrated the growing position and authority Ballester had among the priests of Palma. Yet the colloquia, her position, and her virtue were in a gray area with these events and actions.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., Calificador, "audiencia de la acusación," March 13, 1670, *capítulo 77*, image 255.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., Fray Masso, June 30, 1670, image 411.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

Those who held suspicions demonstrated, again, that the community doubted spiritual motherhood the most when the actions, behaviors, and appearance of the spiritual mother crossed the line from fervent virtue to the pursuit of vainglory. Some doubters described the colloquia as further evidence of her *vanagloria*. Witnesses noted that the priests began offering Ballester rides to the colloquia in their coaches. Witnesses stated that the priests did this “por sus buenas opiniones” (owing to their good opinion) of Ballester.¹⁷¹ But detractors described these actions as evidence that she “fue una enemiga de trabajo” (was an enemy of work).¹⁷² This represented an interesting divide in the interpretations of the same behaviors. For doubters used the standard accusations of *vanagloria* and *visiones falsas* surrounded the colloquia, but this material favor was evidence against Ballester, giving critics further reason to doubt her motivations and the acceptability of her behavior and position.

Those in broader Palma who held more severe doubts about Ballester saw the colloquia as little more than a thin veneer for sexual misconduct. Some witnesses noted how on many occasions when Ballester lay ill in the home of the Morlanas, she would call Fuenbuena to her home, and he would stay all night praying for her relief from the demons. They recalled this as *sospechosa* (suspicious).¹⁷³ Here the seeds were sown for greater doubt about her motivations down the line. Masso preemptively emphasized that nothing sexual occurred at the colloquia, which contrasts confusingly with the fact that in 1670 the Inquisition arrested Fuenbuena for sexual solicitation, in whose trial Ballester prominently featured as a seductress and potential prostitute, faking her spiritual abilities and using her body and charms for personal financial

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, Margarita Binemiles, February 6, 1670, image 225.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ Proceso de fe de Pedro de Fuenbuena, 1670–1672, AHN, Consejo de la Inquisición, legajo 1705, exp. 19, images 7–8.

gain. Masso seems to have emphasized this point in defense of Ballester, despite the fact that at least some of the community suspected her conduct with the priests, and Fuenbuena in particular, to be sexual in nature.¹⁷⁴ The colloquia did not necessarily feature sexual misconduct, but already some priests and members of the public suspected that something odd was occurring in the attention Ballester was gaining and the wealth it brought along with it.

Nevertheless, through the colloquia and their acceptance among the community of priests in Palma, Ballester was able to act as a spiritual adviser and educator, just as Melgarejo and the other spiritual mothers did in their own communities. In her colloquia with the priests, as in her private and public lives, she performed as that community expected: she was sexually moral, she was generous, she advised and cared for others, and, perhaps most important, she was obedient to the male authority figures in her life. While some doubted her, many supported her, believing and recording the visions and colloquia for everyone's benefit. Ballester built up a working relationship with the priests of Palma, Dominicans and Franciscans, and became an essential stop for clergy visiting Palma.

Ballester and the Merchant Elite:

Throughout the first half of her time in Palma (1660–1665), Ballester established key relationships. The majority of those have already been mentioned: the Morlanas, the Dominican and Franciscan priests, and many members of the public. Her most significant connection among the priests was Fuenbuena, who became her confessor from 1663 onward and would become her closest partner and contact with the broader community for the rest of her time in Palma. The intersection of these groups and individuals is what led to outrage and doubt of far greater

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

significance than what she initially faced when she began to operate in the city; ultimately, this points to the central issue of why she was an outlier in spiritual motherhood: she sought personal gain at any cost.

Ballester's actions as a spiritual mother in Palma gradually attracted more attention, and thus more gifts and financial support. The Morlanas were widows of the mercantile elite and often gave her gifts of clothing and money to show their support. When Fuster died, he left her over 100 libras in his will, enough to buy half her husband's lands (two small homes and a modest plot of land) which she had to sell after husband's death. Fuenbuena, her confessor, was also the confessor of the Morlanas and their families, and together this network introduced Ballester to ever greater opportunities to profit from her status as a spiritual mother.¹⁷⁵

In 1663 Fuenbuena and the Morlanas introduced Ballester to Miguel Torongi, a man over whom she held great influence from then on. Torongi, a wealthy local businessman nearing the end of his life, became intensely interested in his legacy and the destination of his spirit following his death. Fuenbuena and Fuster informed him of Ballester, a woman who frequently had relations with God, angels, demons, and the souls of Purgatory. Intrigued, he requested an interview with her. This led to strong relationships between her, Fuenbuena, and Torongi, and also to the central event that caused the greatest outrage in Palma, demarcating the limit of what the community was willing to accept in a spiritual mother.¹⁷⁶

Witnesses reported that she spent a great deal of time with Torongi from 1663 to 1664. He came to her to speak of "cosas de espíritu" (spiritual things).¹⁷⁷ Apparently impressed with

¹⁷⁵ Haliczzer, *Between Exaltation and Infamy*, p. 106.

¹⁷⁶ Proceso de fe de Catalina Ballester, Catalina Morlana, image 88; Rafael Torongi, May 23, 1670, images 350–351; Guillermo Torongi, September 10, 1670, images 351–352; and Magdalena Morlana, images 160–161.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, Magdalena Morlana, images 160–161.

the observations she made and the advice she gave, their relationship continued to grow. Witnesses observed that during this time Torongi spent over 700 libras (enough to buy her husband's lands three times over) to "apoyar el gran espíritu de Ballester" (to support the great spirit of Ballester).¹⁷⁸ As this relationship between Ballester, Torongi, and Fuenbuena grew, people within their immediate community saw it as beneficial for all because it drew Torongi closer to the *beatas* and the convent over which Fuenbuena presided.¹⁷⁹ Those outside the relationship sometimes interpreted it as a further example of her "vainglory," as evidence that Ballester had departed from the virtuous path for personal financial gain. Still worse, rumors circulated that Fuenbuena and Ballester were a sexual couple and that Ballester was seducing and beguiling Torongi to gain his wealth for herself and Fuenbuena.¹⁸⁰ When Torongi spread his financial support beyond Ballester and the Carmelites to include the Morlanas, outrage soon spread among the Torongis and the public.

In 1664 Ballester's doubters' fears redoubled when Torongi drew up a new will that showed a clear and obvious bias toward her, her son (living with the Morlanas), and the convent under Fuenbuena's care. In his new will, Torongi left all his worldly wealth to the Carmelite convent, with a stipend of 100 libras to be paid as a single gift to Ballester's son to support him as he pursued religious orders.¹⁸¹ Fuenbuena oversaw the creation of this new will and testament, casting further doubt on its trustworthiness, and Ballester and her son were present at its completion and signing. This new will completely cut out Torongi's son and family, who were intensely concerned, and justifiably so. It only became more alarming to the Torongis and other

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., Catalina Morlana, image 88.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., Magdalena Morlana, images 160–161.

¹⁸⁰ Proceso de fe de Pedro de Fuenbuena.

¹⁸¹ Proceso de fe de Catalina Ballester, Guillermo Torongi, images 351–352.

doubters when Ballester claimed that she would take stewardship over the 100 libras until such a time as her son took his vows to join the Franciscan Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mercy. She claimed to fear that her young son, then nineteen years old, would abandon the religious path if he had such financial means to support himself.¹⁸² Her relationship with Torongi might have been overlooked, or grudgingly accepted, if it had not been for the death of Fuster in 1664.

Fuster, the canon of the cathedral in Palma, had always been Ballester's strongest supporter and public defender. He had watched over her spiritual health and career for more than a decade and actively rebuked those who spoke against her.¹⁸³ When he died in 1664, she lost her primary defender and supporter and had to turn to those who, while supportive, were less influential: Fuenbuena, Vanrell, Anglada, and Masso. At the same time, she also oversaw a large transfer of wealth from Torongi to Fuenbuena and herself. These events made 1664 a pivotal moment in which Ballester's spiritual motherhood transitioned from a shade of light to deep gray in the eyes of her doubters.

This can be further evidenced by a unique event that took place when she returned to her first community in Falaniche. In 1665 she returned to her hometown to attempt to buy back the lands that had once belonged to her husband. She arrived well-dressed from the gifts of the Morlanas, Torongi, and others. Further, she returned riding in the coach of a priest. The community was so distressed at her appearance as a wealthy woman that they reportedly screamed at her, calling her a *mujer mala* (bad woman) full of vainglory, among various other insults (mentioned but not recorded). The rector of the Franciscans in Falaniche reported that Ballester was so upset that she simply climbed back into the coach and had the priest return her

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, Jaime Vanrell, image 333, Calificador's "hechos y dichos," image 309.

¹⁸³ Haliczzer, *Between Exaltation and Infamy*, p. 75.

to Palma.¹⁸⁴ The people of Falaniche rapidly demonstrated that her outward appearance and her riding in the coach, and all that implied about her behavior, were not acceptable for someone whom they expected to be a pious and valuable spiritual mother. The people of Palma were not far behind in their rejection of Ballester.

As early as 1663, doubters and detractors had approached the Inquisition, which opened a file and investigation into Ballester and gathered testimonies. But it was not until the deaths of Fuster and Torongi in 1664 and 1665, respectively, that the community demonstrated that Ballester's behavior, appearance, and beliefs would no longer be considered acceptable nor tolerated. A sudden outpouring of witnesses and an investigation by the Inquisition followed, and in 1669 both Fuenbuena and Ballester were arrested on suspicion of abusing their positions for personal gain as well as sexual solicitation.

Ballester and the Inquisition, 1663–1673:

The order of events and the investigation of the Inquisition provide insight into where, when, and which events and behaviors drove the community to doubt Ballester and demand inquisitorial justice. It was in 1663 and 1664, when Ballester and Fuenbuena developed a conspicuous and public relationship with Torongi, that the first of the witnesses appeared before the Holy Office in Palma. Those who first reported her actions to the Inquisition were all priests of the Franciscan order. Their testimonies focused on her colloquia, visions, and public status as an admired woman but also, most significantly, her relationship with Fuenbuena. The Franciscans noted the fact that Vanrell, Fuenbuena, and Masso had written down her visions and then incorporated them into sermons they gave as part of the rite of the Mass. If this were not

¹⁸⁴ Proceso de fe de Catalina Ballester, Fray Francisco Marjal, no date provided, images 29–31.

enough, they claimed that she was “sospechosa” (suspect) because one of her visions revealed that a Franciscan of Falaniche would be the next pope.¹⁸⁵ These initial suspicions were targeted at whether Ballester’s visions were reliably from God and his angels and not some deception of the devil, which would make her an *ilusa* (one deceived by demons). They suspected that her “demonic torments,” which occurred nightly, provided reason to be “suspicious” of the source of such grandiose claims and inclusion in the sermons provided to the people of Palma.

Resentment stirred, and doubt festered for two years before more individuals came forward to testify to what the community found truly unacceptable. By 1665 Fuster and Torongi were both dead. It was when Torongi’s will went into effect that dissenters became certain that Ballester was a false visionary only out for personal gain. Almost as soon as the will went into effect, several witnesses appeared before the Inquisition, including Catalina Morlana, who became Ballester’s most outspoken opponent before the Inquisition. While Ballester had been described in 1663 as “sospechosa,” in 1665 doubters among the Franciscans, the Morlanas, and members of the community described her as “escandalosa” (scandalous), vainglorious, and guilty of “solicitudación” (asking for or providing sexual favors) and generally attacked her character in reaction to the dubious motivations of Torongi’s will and her and Fuenbuena’s manipulations of the event, which resulted in personal gain for them both.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., Fray Julio Baptista Mas, “religioso del convento de San Francisco de esta ciudad,” October 6, 1663, images 13–15; Fray Miguel Veim, “lector jubilado del orden de San Francisco,” October 3, 1663, images 10–13; and Fray Antonio Petro, images 16–17.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., Doctor Guillermo Binemelis, “Rector que ha sido de la villa de Falaniche,” February 20, 1665, images 22–25; Don Nicolás Andreu, “médico,” February 16, 1665, images 25–27; Ana Andreu Diajaba, “mujer del Don Nicolás Andreu, médico,” March 31, 1665, images. 27–28; Fray Antonio Petro, August 18, 1666, images 28–29; Catalina Morlana, August 26, 1666–November 29, 1666, images 31–111.

Seeking more information, the Inquisition turned to the opinions of Ballester's first community in Falaniche. Those called corroborated that in her early years Ballester behaved in similar ways to her life in Palma, wearing white clothes, healing the sick and injured, engaging in acts of charity, being beset by demons, and living as a religious woman, the Beata of Falaniche. However, apart from the accusation of theft that went unproven, the Inquisition did not discover a great deal of evidence to support any sexual misconduct or behavior specifically targeted toward financial gain. As the events had occurred some years before 1663, the Inquisition reached far and wide through correspondence and interviews, attempting to piece together the various events and opinions of those in Falaniche, focusing on the events that caused Ballester to leave Falaniche and the opinions of the priests there.¹⁸⁷ In light of the combined evidence from both communities, the Inquisition's *calificadores* (theologians who evaluated the orthodoxy of her statements) found sufficient evidence to recommend to the inquisitors that they arrest, incarcerate, and question her.

In October 1669 Ballester was arrested on suspicion of falsifying her visions for personal gain, which inculpated Fuenbuena, who was arrested not long after, in February 1670, for abusing his position as a priest for seeking personal gain, engaging in sexual misconduct (solicitation), and supporting a false visionary.¹⁸⁸ The Inquisition took special note of the relationship between Fuenbuena and Ballester because the public had demonstrated that it was that relationship that had corrupted one or both morally, sexually, and financially. To do this, they examined the correspondence between the two.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., Doctor Guillermo Binemelis, February 20, 1665, images 22–25; Don Nicolás Andreu, February 16, 1665, images 25–27; Ana Andreu Diajaba, March 31, 1665, images 27–28.

¹⁸⁸ Proceso de fe de Fray Pedro de Fuenbuena, “audiencia de la calificación,” February 1670.

In total, they had eight letters. Ballester wrote two, and Fuenbuena wrote six. They spanned the years 1663–1666.¹⁸⁹ Fuenbuena’s letters reveal that he had the utmost respect for her as a woman and as a future saint. Throughout his letters his language is direct and clear that Ballester held his support and that he advocated on her behalf. He referred to her as the “hermana de mi ánima” (sister of my spirit) and stated “que eres una gran santa” (that you are a great saint).¹⁹⁰ He deepened the level of his commitment to this idea when he informed her that he had “que dar los escritos a mi vicario [el Obispo Damián] ... mi amigo y que él tiene toda confianza en [Ballester]” ([he had] to give her writings to my vicar [Bishop Damian] and my friend, and that he has total confidence in [Ballester]).¹⁹¹ In return, she offered support and advice from the position of her own religious authority. Most of the language employed was similar to the acceptable behavior among the religious, as laid out in various scholarly articles and books about the relationship between confessor and penitent.¹⁹² Yet the depth of longing for and missing one another expressed was a concern that raised question marks that painted them as a couple rather than priest and penitent. This ultimately, despite their explanations, led to their condemnations, first publicly and then in the Inquisition.

Having examined the letters, the Inquisition, keeping Ballester in jail, proceeded to call several witnesses from October 1669 to July 1670 to enhance their understanding of the events and check various aspects of her relationships and status in Palma. Many of these had participated in the lives of Fuenbuena, his convent, Ballester, and the Morlanas. Key to

¹⁸⁹ Proceso de fe de Catalina Ballester, “papeles que se hallaron de Catalina Ballester y Pedro de Fuenbuena,” October 1669, images 113–127.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., letter among “papeles que se hallaron,” images 115–116.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., letter among “papeles que se hallaron,” images 113–115.

¹⁹² Bilinkoff, *Related Lives*. Bilinkoff, *Ávila of Saint Teresa*, pp. 108–150.

Ballester's defense was Magdalena Morlana, who testified in almost direct opposition to Catalina Morlana, her sister. She reported almost every event that Catalina Morlana did but framed them in the language of *santa*, *virtuosa*, and *milagrosa* (holy, virtuous, and miraculous).¹⁹³ In addition, the inquisitors called new witnesses as well as recalling several who had first denounced Ballester. These witnesses included some who had lived with her and some who simply saw her on the street and commented on her behavior. Again, the picture is overwhelmingly gray, with most people agreeing on the events that had occurred but differing in their assessment of them as positive or negative. With conflicting information, the Inquisition continued to call witnesses to gain the clearest picture possible even as they began speaking to Ballester in court.

In March 1670 the Inquisition presented their accusations of misconduct to Ballester and asked her to respond. The list of their accusations was detailed and extensive but revolved around the idea that Ballester had been a false visionary in Falaniche and that she had carried that misconduct to Palma and there proceeded to shift from simply seeking vainglory to engaging in sexual misconduct and pursuing personal financial gain. The most powerful language they put forward throughout was:

- “expulsada de Falaniche por su mal comportamiento” (expelled from Falaniche for her poor comportment); on her sexually amoral behavior in Palma (charge 2)
- “un cierto religioso grave, le dijo que cierto día en la calle que un eclesiástico miró la solicitaba e inquietaba” (that a certain grave priest said he saw a [priest] soliciting and disturbing her [Ballester]); (charge 28)
- “romper de obediencias en leer y escribir sus visiones” (break obedience in reading and writing down her visions); and, in regard to her deceptions and false virtue (charge 16),
- “con sus embustes, fingida virtud, y otras muchas cosas llenó la cabeza [of her confessor, Anglada] desto de falsas creencia[s]. Y de tal manera que de allí en adelante la tenía dicho confesor por mujer muy santa.” (With her deceptions, faked virtue, and many other things, filled the head [of her confessor, Anglada]

¹⁹³ Proceso de fe de Catalina Ballester, Magdalena Morlana, October 26 1669-July 1670, images 136–180.

with false beliefs. And in this manner from then on [her confessor] took her to be a very holy woman.)¹⁹⁴

These were the core issues in the case—falsifying her visions, writing them down, speaking of them publicly, and then deceiving good men and sexually soliciting them for their money and support. In response to these accusations, her own language was that of surprise and innocent intention.

Ballester presented a contrite image. The majority of her words in this case occur immediately after the accusation in the form of her responses to them. She was asked to respond to over two hundred separate charges. To almost all of them, she either flat out said that she “negaba” (denied) them or “no se acuerda” (did not remember) anything about the charge.¹⁹⁵ Those she did choose to respond to had to do with Fuster, the Morlanas, Torongi, and Fuenbuena. Her attitude toward the priests and Fuster was generally positive; she agreed that she knew them and obeyed them, and that she had held Fuster in particular to be *santo* (holy).¹⁹⁶ When the Morlanas or anything pertaining to Fuenbuena arose, she indicated that she had close relationships with them but often emphasized their influence over her, saying that she was “una mujer ignorante” (an ignorant woman).¹⁹⁷ When Torongi came up in charge 196, she was particularly effusive in her response, saying especially “que él tenia espíritu de ser pobre y dejar su hacienda por amor de Dios ... y que esta [Ballester] la [sic] aconsejaba no hiciese dicha donación si no quería ser pobre ... y que fue su decisión de dar dicha donación a[l] convento de Nuestra Señora de la Merced [Fuenbuena’s convent].” (That she believed he had the spirit to be

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., “audiencia de la acusación,” March 13, 1670, *cargos* 2–4 images 237–238, *cargo* 28 image 260, and *cargo* 16, image 240.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., “audiencia de la acusación,” March 13, 1670, images 294–311.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

poor and leave his estate/farm for the love of God ... and that she [Ballester] counseled him not to make the donation if he did not want to be poor ... and that it was his decision to make the donation to the convent of Our Lady of Mercy [Fuenbuena's convent].¹⁹⁸ In all of this, her defense was that she was a virtuous woman who had believed in the men in her life; she otherwise shunted the responsibility away from herself.

Once Ballester had responded, the Inquisition continued to hear witnesses in accusation and defense of Ballester from March 1670 to September 1672. The witnesses, requests for information, and proceedings continued to stretch further and further afield. The Inquisition requested information from the tribunal of Valencia, as Ballester's family had lived there for a time when she was young, and some there still remembered her. They asked the tribunal of Barcelona to interview a priest living in the city who had known her as a visionary in Falaniche, and had the report forwarded to their own records. They called witnesses further and further removed from the central events of her life, including Rafael Torongi, Miguel's brother, who no longer lived in Palma and only vaguely knew that his brother had made the donation and that his nephew Guillermo was upset. The information became murkier, based more on distant memory and continuously shadowed by the contradicting attributions of holiness and heresy.¹⁹⁹ In the end, the debate came down to whether to believe Ballester and her supporters, who claimed that all she did was contrite, holy, and God given, or those who thought she was vainglorious, a liar, and one who sought personal gain.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., "audiencia de la acusación," March 13, 1670, images 308–309.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., "carta para la inquisición de Valencia," images 634–637; "testigo en el real palacio de la Inquisición de Barcelona," June 30, 1670, images 403–432; Rafael Torongi, May 23, 1670, images 350–352.

In September 1672 the Inquisition determined that she was guilty on all charges. They condemned her for being a false visionary, engaging in sexual solicitation, and pursuing her own vainglory and personal wealth. They commanded that she meet the following sentence: (1) She was to wear a San Benito over her clothes for the period of one year. (2) One Sunday in each month she was required to hear Mass in the cathedral of the city. (3) For a period of ten years, she was to serve in the hospital of the Poor Clares, and when not doing serving, she was to be kept in a cell in the hospital. (4) She was to participate in a public auto-da-fé in which she would walk the streets proclaiming her heresy. (5) Should the Inquisition deem it necessary, further punishments were to come if she relapsed.²⁰⁰ In February 1673 Ballester and Fuenbuena (who was found guilty of solicitation and the abuse of his office) participated in the auto-da-fé in Palma, and from there they dropped out of the historical record as public religious actors. The Inquisition and the community had decided to remove her as a threat to spiritual health.

Conclusion:

The communities with whom Ballester interacted demonstrate not only her personal ability to navigate the bounds of spiritual motherhood in shaping her self-presentation to meet community expectations but also the versatility of the model overall. Overall, she can be said to have been a failure as a spiritual mother; she exceeded the limitations of acceptable behavior for a spiritual mother in both Falaniche and Palma—in Falaniche for violating the modest model they expected and being accused of vainglory, and in Palma for using her spiritual gifts and sexual solicitation for personal gain. However, she provides a particularly useful window

²⁰⁰ Ibid., *consulta*, September 20, 1672, images 757–758.

through which to look at the importance of community to spiritual motherhood throughout the early modern Spanish Empire.

The shifting landscapes and time periods determined what was acceptable for a spiritual mother in any given community. What was possible and acceptable for women like Teresa of Ávila among the Spanish religious and political elite in Ávila was not the same for even another great saint, such as St. Rosa of Lima in Peru. Both shifted and adapted their appearance, behavior, and rhetoric to meet community (and personal) expectations and achieve acceptance, while in turn shaping what would be accepted and expected in the future. Ballester operated in a small community and the capital of Mallorca in the mid-seventeenth century, and even within her life and experience, there was a broad range of what was expected and/or accepted. In Falaniche, the community expected and accepted a hardworking, charitable, humble visionary. In Palma, the community around Ballester (though in the end not the entire community) accepted a version of spiritual motherhood that included more ostentation, more direct engagement in theological discourse, and interaction with those seemingly above her station in the merchant and middle elite. Yet her example still demonstrates a general limit on what was acceptable behavior in Spanish Catholic communities when set against other historical examples.

Spiritual motherhood's outward appearance and behavior were adaptable, vibrant, and often specific to an individual and her community. However, the general trends of charity, healing, and education are present. Even the somewhat unusual manifestation of Ballester's colloquia is not unique, as Luisa Melgarejo held similar events with her fellow mystics in Lima, Peru, in the early seventeenth century and Teresa of Ávila was known to have similar discourses as well. This was more common among spiritual mothers who held higher social status, but not exclusively, as Ballester and others (like Angela Carranza of Lima) demonstrate. So, while these

women could and did perform as specific and individual manifestations in their communities, they exhibited the same foundational components that represent spiritual motherhood: teaching, advising, healing, engaging in charity, and demonstrating personal virtue. Ballester's case, and those of the many convents in Spain and the Americas, demonstrate the importance of the clothing associated with religiosity.

Communities were more tolerant of the behavior of those who dressed in a manner they associated with piety. Clothing choices were more fluid than the core concepts described above, as Ballester's case shows. However, there was a "look" that communities associated with piety and spiritual motherhood. In Falaniche it was simple clothing; in Palma they expected her to dress more richly. Throughout it all, lay spiritual mothers' adoption of tertiary habits or habits associated with religious orders was important to community acceptance. Ballester changed her habit to fit the community she currently belonged to. Others, like María Jacinta Montoya, adopted or created their own outward appearance and uniform of piety. These were positives that weighed in a spiritual mother's favor.

Ballester also highlights what the communities throughout the early modern Spanish Empire could not accept from their spiritual mothers: personal vainglory, sexual misbehavior, or financial gain. This was a concern for all female penitents, both lay and religious, throughout the early modern period following the Council of Trent. The lessons and expectations certainly had sunk into the communities of Falaniche and Palma in the 1660s, as both communities expelled Ballester from their ranks in response to her exhibiting behavior they considered to be vainglorious. In her case, that behavior was attached to wealth and appearance, as she shifted her appearance to meet her communities' expectations, and people suspected or felt her

manipulations. But in the broader world of spiritual motherhood, this limit on vainglory and personal gain underlay most of the suspicions that communities held toward spiritual mothers.

Suspicion affected all spiritual mothers, successful and unsuccessful, with rare exceptions. Luisa Melgarejo was suspected of *vanagloria* in the wake of St. Rosa of Lima's death, despite her escape from sentencing. As we will see in the next chapter, María Jacinta Montoya also felt these suspicions from the archbishopric and the Inquisition of Lima. Following Trent, communities accepted male church authority and expected it to temper spiritual mothers. The effect of these pressures has been covered well in the secondary literature, but best in the examples where those male authorities failed. Ballester represents one such case, but so does Lucrecia de León, the famous visionary of sixteenth-century Spain.²⁰¹ In these examples, the power of the women exceeded what the communities expected or accepted, and blame was shared equally between both the men and women involved.

The only other constant among the communities that caused concern and doubt was far harder to define, interrogate, and punish, and thus appears less frequently in community opinions, denunciations, and ultimate sentences: false visions or deceived visions. Most of the laity had difficulty knowing whether a vision or miracle had been sent by God or the Devil or was feigned entirely. Instead, this debate tended to occur among those with more education and status: the social elite, various priests, and the religious orders. These communities would be the most likely to approach their doubt and lack of acceptance of a spiritual mother from this angle. Ballester again offers unique insight into community expectations because her life demonstrates a contrast between two types of communities.

²⁰¹ Richard L. Kagan, *Lucrecia's Dreams: Politics and Prophecy in Sixteenth-Century Spain* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 1–35.

In Falaniche almost all community rejection resulted from suspicions that Ballester was vainglorious. However, in Palma, among the community of priests and the social elite, there were also doubts over the source of her visions and colloquia. This contrast is also visible among those spiritual mothers who interacted with the elite and the theologically educated. Lucrecia de León exemplifies this: she interacted primarily with the elite, and among those who knew and interacted with her, the source of her visions was just as much in doubt as her motivations (whether she sought personal advancement and enrichment).²⁰² This was also true of María Jacinta Montoya (in the next chapter) and Catalina de Vargas (in the final chapter), who moved between the communities of the poor and those of the religious orders and the social elite. Thus, community opinion about the source of visions was more dependent on social standing and education than the subject of vainglory.

The focus on community opinion, expectations, and acceptance provides powerful insight into the durability and scope of spiritual motherhood. All spiritual mothers faced these expectations, and all either succeeded or failed to navigate them. Through the case of Ballester, the broad trends of what communities could and could not accept become clear. They expected a woman to be charitable, to heal, to act and dress befitting her role, and to obey male church authority and never supersede it. They could not accept a woman who pursued personal gain in wealth or station, or, depending on the community, a woman whom demons easily deceived or attempted to deceive. If a spiritual mother stayed within the bounds of a community's expectations, even if she flirted with the borders and gray areas, she could become a significant public and religious authority, educating, advising, and mentoring the members of her community with regard to how to live, eat, think, and pray—all of which had lasting impacts on

²⁰² Ibid., pp. 1–9.

the religious traditions and lifestyles of those communities, shaping the community expectations future spiritual mothers had to navigate.

Chapter 3: Spiritual Motherhood as Path to Racial Whitening: María Jacinta Montoya

Racism is still with us. But it is up to us to prepare our children for what they have to meet, and, hopefully, we shall overcome.

—Rosa Parks, Speech at Howard University, 1998

Introduction:

This case study of María Jacinta Montoya (also known as María Jacinta de la Santísima Trinidad) and her husband, Nicolás Ayllón (also Nicolás de Dios), highlights an instance where spiritual motherhood allowed those who were racially different to become prominent in traditional Spanish Catholic society.²⁰³ Ayllón was of indigenous heritage, an *indio*, and Montoya was of mixed racial heritage, a *mestiza* (the daughter of an *india* and a Spanish man). Their efforts as spiritual figures centered on the native population of Lima in the seventeenth century (1640–1705). They cared for the poor, destitute, and wayward young women of the native communities, creating a *recogimiento* (a religious school and shelter) they named the Recogimiento de Jesús, María y José (Young People’s Home and School of Jesus, Mary, and Josef).²⁰⁴ The native population were grateful for their efforts, but Montoya and Ayllón also received support from religious orders and state officials because of their efforts to educate young native women and integrate them into the Catholic faith. Montoya engaged with

²⁰³ The principal documentation for this chapter comes from the “Proceso de fe de María Jacinta de la Santísima Trinidad,” AHN, Consejo de la Inquisición, legajo 1649, exp. 51. All my references to the original trial documentation are from the images of the digitized document available in PARES.

²⁰⁴ Neither Montoya nor Ayllón provided a firm number for the historical record, but I extrapolated this information from their description of the first group (four young women) and witness reports of the procession of many young women to Church (through many decades), the reported expansion projects the couple undertook on their *recogimiento*, and the ultimate conversion of the *recogimiento* into a convent, at which many young women came and went throughout the years.

Catholicism through her work with young native women, and through that engagement she became a prominent spiritual mother. Her legacy continued even after her death when the *recogimiento* gained lasting Church support, becoming an official Capuchin convent.

While Montoya grounded her efforts as a spiritual mother in an identity of helping the native women of her community (both racial and social), this same grounding caused issues for her as a spiritual mother. Both the Inquisition and the archbishopric examined the life and beliefs of Montoya, suspecting that she had faked the miracles, visions, and faith she professed in order to advance her spiritual career and that of Ayllón rather than out of any true dedication to Catholicism. In the end, she was acquitted with a censure to cease writing about her or Ayllón's life, visions, and lessons. Montoya is a complicated figure because of her racial heritage, but she was also one of the most successful spiritual mothers in the level of prominence she attained and the relative grace she maintained throughout the period of doubt that beset her. Spiritual motherhood for her was founded on helping those of native heritage by creating an entry point into Catholic-sanctioned spiritual authority.

Race was a far greater issue in the Spanish dominions of the Americas than in late seventeenth-century Iberia and thus presented more opportunities and obstacles for those living in the Americas. In the Spanish system, there existed the concept of "pure race," in which one was all one thing—white, black, or *indio*—which granted an individual a specific status. The "purely white" most often were true Iberians who had recently immigrated, and they held the most power culturally, economically, and spiritually. Status as "pure black" usually meant one was an imported slave from Africa or the offspring of slaves. This status was usually the most oppressive, even with "freedom of the womb," but also made up a very small portion of the population. Status as "pure native" was not wholly without social weight, especially for those

persons, like Ayllón, who could prove their ancestors were *caciques*, native nobility. This status granted a lesser, but still prestigious, brand of nobility within the viceroyalty. Further, those who could prove that they were “pure native” were outside the Inquisition’s authority.²⁰⁵

The concept of race itself was fluid under the Spanish legal system, which allowed one to influence one’s own racial identity. While it was dependent on who one’s parents were, the system had many more categories than the systems employed in the British American colonies. The initial intermixing of the races resulted in groups like the mestizos (white and native) and *mulatos* (white and black), by far the largest of the intermixed categories. Yet, as the intermixing continued over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Spanish legal system continued to invent categorical terms to describe groups of people, to the point that there were more than a dozen defined subcategories within this system. Throughout one’s lifetime one could become more or less “white” through one’s actions and beliefs, a curious feature of early modern racial identity.²⁰⁶

Scholars such as Mónica Díaz and Herman L. Bennett have demonstrated how people from both native and African ancestries were able to change their racial identity through faith and service. Díaz focused on the convents of Mexico, in which mestiza and *india* women became “whiter” through their faith. Díaz emphasized that this represented both an externalized and an internalized understanding of race, as the women considered themselves white and were considered so in their communities regardless of their genetic heritage. They gained this status through adherence to the concept of the “good Christian woman,” faithful, humble, and obedient

²⁰⁵ Rachel Sarah O’Toole, *Bound Lives: Africans, Indians and the Making of Race in Colonial Peru* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012), pp. 1–17.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 1–16. Robert Schwaller, *Géneros de Gente in Early Colonial Mexico: Defining Racial Difference* (University of Oklahoma Press, 2016), pp. 1–18.

to the Catholic Church. The nuns not only internalized their status as “white(r)” but were legally recognized as such.²⁰⁷ Bennett demonstrated how this was equally true of black soldiers serving the king in the various militias of the Spanish Americas, but particularly in the Caribbean and Grand Colombia, where piracy was most extreme. There, soldiers of African ancestry served the king of Spain by fighting in his armies abroad. Just like the nuns of native descent, these men became whiter in both their own minds and the legal system through acts of service to king, country, and Catholicism.²⁰⁸ This model of race and racial status is an important backdrop to the spiritual, social, and identity politics that wrapped around the life and career of Ayllón and Montoya.

Race presents a significant gray area in the current assessment of Montoya and Ayllón’s success or failure as spiritual leaders within the *indio* and Catholic communities of Lima. Several historians, including Stacey Schlau and Nancy van Deusen, have analyzed the case of Ayllón and Montoya and asserted that the pair’s failure to secure Ayllón’s ascendancy to sainthood was tied to their racial heritage. Schlau claimed that the archbishop was strongly opposed to the idea of Ayllón becoming a saint because he was a purely native individual. She argued that the archbishop began Ayllón’s canonization process only as a “token” gesture under the weight of demands from the natives of Lima.²⁰⁹ Van Deusen furthered Schlau’s arguments, claiming that the archbishop deliberately investigated Montoya’s connections to Angela Carranza, a visionary whom the Inquisition condemned in the 1680s. Van Deusen argued that the archbishop pushed to

²⁰⁷ Díaz, *Indigenous Writings from the Convent*.

²⁰⁸ Ben Vinson III. *Bearing Arms for His Majesty: The Free Colored Militia of Colonial Mexico* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), pp. xi-25. Herman L. Bennett, *Africans in Colonial Mexico: Absolutism, Christianity, and Afro-Creole Consciousness, 1570–1640* (Indianapolis: University of Indiana Press, 2003), pp. 1–14.

²⁰⁹ Schlau, *Gendered Crime and Punishment*, pp. 6–20.

connect Carranza's heresies to Montoya's visions, miracles, and spiritual motherhood in order to involve the Inquisition. Further, Montoya was the only one of the pair whom the Inquisition could try, for Ayllón, as a *cacique*, was outside the Inquisition's jurisdiction. Thus, having Montoya before the Inquisition created an environment in which it was possible to block the canonization of Ayllón and curb the power of Montoya herself.²¹⁰ In this way, these historians highlight race as the central issue in the trials and processes that surrounded Ayllón and Montoya.

Thus, the lives of Montoya and Ayllón, and the events surrounding them, are connected to much broader narratives about the struggles of women and the racially different in Spanish Catholic society throughout the Atlantic world. The discussion here builds from the general clash of cultures that Irene Silverblatt developed, in that native, African, and European cultures were in direct conflict in early modern Peru. Silverblatt posited that Peru was a crossroads of culture and faith and was therefore a space of opportunity and conflict where more was possible but at the peril of having various identities (gender, faith, and race) come under fire. Silverblatt argued that women had more space to act within this system, so that racially mestiza women like Montoya could rise to prominence.²¹¹

Schlau and van Deusen expanded on this point by analyzing women's and native people's efforts and their integration into and navigation of this landscape. The image these historians constructed is one of conflict, possibility, and strife, with the institutional authority of the Spanish Empire clashing with the laity, and particularly the native laity, who were struggling for a voice and position within the dominant Catholic culture. They highlighted the lives of

²¹⁰ Van Deusen, "'In so celestial a language,'" pp. 69–74.

²¹¹ Silverblatt, *Modern Inquisitions*, pp. 45–80.

dozens of men and women who lived in that culture, as van Deusen termed it, “between the sacred and the worldly.” The lives of these individuals demonstrated that race, culture, religion, and gender were all more navigable for those living in early modern Peru as compared to those who remained in Europe during this period.²¹² Montoya faced all these realities as she developed from a traditional wife and mother into a spiritual mother over the course of her life.

Montoya’s spiritual motherhood developed in and around the issue of race and support for native peoples. For her, spiritual motherhood was a device to support the spiritual and physical needs of the young native women of her community. She uplifted them from what was essentially a life of homelessness and poverty to a devotional lifestyle in the Catholic faith. In so doing she uplifted herself, gaining prominence, patronage, and support to transform herself and her spiritual daughters into models of Catholic womanhood. Montoya’s faith was founded on the notion of helping young native women, and she herself was a mestiza who had been guided to them initially by Ayllón. In the end, the crisis came more from Ayllón and his canonization than it did from Montoya; well after her trial before the Inquisition, she was able to continue as a spiritual mother and leader of the native people of Lima.

Montoya’s Ascent to Spiritual Motherhood:

A reconstruction of Montoya’s life leading up to her trial in 1701 is made possible by the extensive information she herself provided in her *discurso de su vida* (discourse of her life), essential to every Inquisition trial, and the publication of Ayllón’s *vida* as a model of devotion

²¹² Schlau, *Gendered Crime and Punishment*, pp. 8–18. Van Deusen, *Between the Sacred and the Worldly*, pp. 60–70. Van Deusen, *Global Indios*, pp. 28–35.

across Peru, Spain, and the Papal States. Montoya was born in 1646 to rural estate-holding parents of mixed heritage. The mestiza Montoya's life went forward from there as one of continual growth and success. Her family moved to Lima from the province of Parinachocas when she was four years old. As a result, Montoya experienced the dynamic culture of early modern Lima, which, as Silverblatt has described, featured a strong cadre of devotional laywomen and laymen of both indigenous and Spanish descent who met with a variety of reactions from the Catholic Church and their communities.²¹³

Indeed, Montoya seemed fated to live a life of devotion and prayer as her family paid for her to enter a Carmelite convent as a novice at the age of thirteen (1659). Montoya began her young adult life with the conviction that she would be devoted to the Catholic faith, and her parents encouraged her to do so. She behaved admirably and was considered a model of spiritual devotion despite her age.²¹⁴ She so distinguished herself that she gained Ayllón's attention.

Ayllón was so impressed with the young Montoya's piety and devotion that he asked her parents for her hand in marriage. The age gap between the two (Ayllón was already in his late twenties) caused her parents to resist his initial overtures.²¹⁵ Ayllón persisted, and, impressed with his honesty and piety, her parents relented and allowed Montoya to move into his home

²¹³ Proceso de fe de María Jacinta de la Santísima Trinidad, "Denunciación," December 12, 1701. These ages and details come from María Jacinta's description of her heritage and early life as presented in her letter to the Inquisition denouncing herself to the Holy Office. See also Silverblatt, *Modern Inquisitions*.

²¹⁴ Ibid., "Denunciación," December 14, 1701, images 20–22.

²¹⁵ Bernardo Sartalo, *Vida admirable y muerte prodigiosa de Nicolás de Ayllón y con renombre más glorioso Nicolás de Dios*, (Madrid, 1684). These facts are recorded from the "early life" section of the hagiography of Nicolás de Dios.

under their personal supervision (regular visitation and a designated live-in chaperon) in 1660.²¹⁶ For several years, she thus lived in a pious, if secular, household.

In 1665, at the age of eighteen, Montoya married Ayllón.²¹⁷ In 1667 Montoya had the first of her children, a girl, who died two years later. In 1668 she had a son, who lived until the age of nineteen. The death of her daughter marked an emotional moment in Montoya's life that later appeared in her visions. The memories and experiences of her time as traditional, lay mother laid the foundation for her understanding of her spirituality and her relationship with the children with whom she worked in the future. The years of their traditional, Christian marriage would mark her second and final deviation from a spiritual life, the first being her childhood. In the years to come, Ayllón determined that they should devote themselves fully to the spiritual life.

Ayllón had a plan that would transform his and Montoya's relationship from that of a traditional lay couple to that of established spiritual partners working to better the lives of the young native persons of Lima. In 1671 they moved from their family home into a larger space. There, Ayllón encouraged Montoya to follow him in taking vows of chastity and poverty, no longer living as a traditional married couple. She did, and they lived in relative isolation for three years. Montoya declared this her moment of "conversion" to a devotional life. She was still to obey her husband and continued to do so, but now she would care for him in ways separate from the traditional sacrament of marriage.

²¹⁶ Proceso de fe de María Jacinta de la Santísima Trinidad, *Denunciación*, December 14, 1701, images 20–22.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, *Denunciación*, December 12, 1701. These facts are reconstructed from the brief comments Montoya made about coming to meet the man who was to shape the course of her life in the *discurso de su vida* portion of her letter to the Inquisition.

Montoya explained how this conversion shifted how she and her husband were to live, divorcing them from the traditional limits of human nature; this was, in her opinion, the first example of divine favor in her life. She claimed that because of their vows, God had removed the carnal desires from their bodies: “Our Lord [God] made me in the virtue of chastity at the age of twenty-four, and other times, God granted me the grace of innocence.”²¹⁸ This newfound innocence changed the way the couple perceived each other. Without carnal relations, they no longer lived as a secular husband and wife. Montoya confirmed this when she explained, “From that day [of their vows] forward, we lived as brother and sister, and although we slept in the same bed it was always as [if we were] two logs.”²¹⁹ Deciding that the metaphor of sleeping like two inanimate pieces of wood was not sufficient explanation, she went on to say that she never offered herself to him, and if he saw her body it was without passion, rather “with the honesty and innocence of a child of two years.”²²⁰ The brother-sister relationship that Montoya conjured here represented a flexible and layered metaphor, which defined how they began to bolster their authority as a religious duo of husband and wife, but even more as individuals who happened to live together and who were devoted to God and to one another as brother and sister.

The brother-sister relationship offers a useful explanation of how Ayllón and Montoya internalized their faith and redefined their living relationship into something closer to the “white” Catholic ideal. The brother-sister status/relationship they created mirrored the religious orders of

²¹⁸ Ibid., excerpt from the transcripts of the archbishop’s examination of spirit, December 14, 1701: “vuelvo a decir para declarar más de que su majestad me hizo sobre la virtud de la castidad que siendo de edad de veinte y cuatro años y algunas veces más me concedió Dios la gracia de la inocencia.”

²¹⁹ Ibid.: “desde este día vivimos como dos hermanos que, aunque dormíamos juntos era como si estuviéramos dos troncos.”

²²⁰ Ibid.: “con la candidez e inocencia de una criatura de dos años.”

the Catholic faith. Ayllón and Montoya lived like a Franciscan friar and a Carmelite nun in their minds, projecting that image outward into the broader community. They changed their names to reflect their new devotional life and status. Nicolás Ayllón and María Jacinta Montoya became Nicolás de Dios and María Jacinta de la Santísima Trinidad, cementing in their very names and identities their allegiance to God.²²¹ These decisions made sense in light of Ayllón's eventual goal of establishing a *recogimiento* for young native women seeking a religious education, as well as Montoya's previous time in a convent. Already of relatively high racial status, they moved to make themselves more so, using the means and methods available to them through the Catholic faith.

Ayllón and Montoya spent most of their money to build up their home into a *recogimiento* for young native women. This unique space in Spanish Catholic culture stemmed from the efforts of the pious members of society to adopt and take in (*recoger*) young people of the community in need of a strong devotional model. In the *recogimiento* young laypersons and their lay supervisors were meant to mirror the devotion and activities of monasteries and convents while still being actively engaged in and visible to the broader community as individuals and as a group.²²² Overwhelmingly, these spaces were reserved for those of white, Spanish heritage, and elites of that group formed, funded, and ran those locations. As van Deusen observed, these spaces were meant to preserve and promote Spanish Catholicism and

²²¹ Ibid., "Denunciación y discurso de su vida," December 12, 1701: María Jacinta frequently referred to 1671, and its events, as the time she determined to follow the religious life and to obey her husband and mother not only her children, but those of the people of Lima as well.

²²² Stacey Schlau, "Angela Carranza, Would-Be Theologian," in Jeana DelRosso, Leigh Eicke, and Ana Kothe, eds., *The Catholic Church and Unruly Women Writers: Critical Essays* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), and Irene Silverblatt, *Moon, Sun and Witches: Gender Ideologies and Class in Inca and Colonial Peru* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), introduction.

whiteness and were part of an international effort by religious orders to do so.²²³ Ayllón and Montoya adapted this tradition to realize his desire to take in young, wayward women of indigenous descent to better their spiritual lives using the European models of devotion, which in the same instant drew them closer to the white elite of Spanish society.

For Montoya, this marked a clear moment of change and reorientation, from a privately devoted woman to an activist, as a spiritual mother, on behalf of native persons. She, however, made this change with less enthusiasm than in her previous efforts. At this stage of her life, she had lived with Ayllón for almost fourteen years, half of her life. During that time, she had adhered to his desires. He wanted to marry; they did. Ayllón wanted to move and take vows of poverty and chastity; Montoya also moved, and she took the vows as well. According to her own relation of events, this was the first time she had showed anything like resistance to Ayllón's wishes for their lives. Montoya described that she had become used to her life the way it was and was unsure about this latest undertaking. Upon hearing Ayllón's desire to change the home into a *recogimiento* and bring in young women, she stated that "she felt a little repugnance" (*tuve alguna repugnancia*) toward the idea.²²⁴ Ayllón expressed that he knew she could care for them, and she, convinced by Ayllón's devotional example and moved by love of both him and the faith, followed his lead once again and cared for the young women he soon brought into their home.²²⁵

While this was a moment of doubt and concern, she once again demonstrated key characteristics and hallmarks of spiritual motherhood: obedience and deference to male

²²³ Van Deusen, *Between the Sacred and the Worldly*, introduction.

²²⁴ Proceso de fe de María Jacinta de la Santísima Trinidad, "Denunciación y discurso de su vida," December 14, 1701, images 23–24.

²²⁵ *Ibid.* Montoya described these events in many places throughout the denunciation; it affected her understanding of the major change in her life.

authority. Further, she had associated herself more and more closely with the Catholic ideals related to female religious. She soon grew to love and cherish their efforts at the *recogimiento*, becoming a spiritual mother for the young native women in her care. She went on to develop an entire lifestyle in the Catholic tradition to edify and protect them.

Starting a *Recogimiento*:

In 1674 Ayllón brought the first of the young women, ages thirteen and fourteen, into the *recogimiento*. Together, he and Montoya taught the young women the tenets of the devotional life and endeavored to distance their impressionable souls from the dangers of the darker aspects of Lima's "dark" side, drawing them closer to its "white" side. Their activities and regimen included work in the *recogimiento*'s gardens, daily prayers, and devotional service (cleaning, ministering, and healing) outside their walls in service of those in their neighborhood and the community.²²⁶ From the very beginning, Montoya acted as a spiritual mother figure in name, thought, and deed as she led these young women through the spiritual exercises of caring for themselves and the household, leading by example, while Ayllón taught them about theology and how and why to pray as white Catholics would have them do.

Their efforts were noteworthy, as theirs was one of the few *recogimientos* run by and for peoples of native descent. While others throughout the Spanish Empire in the early modern period created *recogimientos*, convents, and groups designed specifically to edify those of indigenous and African descent, the *recogimiento* of Ayllón and Montoya stood out for the success and popular support it enjoyed from its inception until it became a convent after their

²²⁶ Ibid., "Discurso de su vida," December 14, 1701, images 52–53.

deaths.²²⁷ Initially, the couple built and supported the running of the *recogimiento* independently; they were constantly in the public eye and needed public aid, begging alms to continue their work.

This placed them and their efforts to educate and evangelize natives under greater scrutiny than others like them. While certain convents in Spain and Spanish America were able to have a broad reach, as Elizabeth Leffeldt has described, Ayllón and Montoya's efforts were far more transparent. They often walked with their charges to and from Mass, and they allowed members of the community to enter the home and observe their efforts.²²⁸ The native population saw them caring for their youth in need, and the Spanish white elites saw them edifying and educating young *indias* in what it meant to be Catholic and, therefore, whiter.²²⁹

Understanding and Expanding the *Recogimiento*:

From their initial efforts in the *recogimiento*, their story reads as a tale of rising stars; their reputation and status continued to grow throughout Lima's society at the popular, ecclesiastical, and noble levels. In the first year of the *recogimiento*, their confessor and spiritual guide, Maestro Pedro Tovar of the Augustinians, asked the pair to begin writing about their lives and experiences. He encouraged both to write down their system of aiding the devotional life of the young of Lima so that others might model their own efforts after theirs.²³⁰ Here Ayllón and

²²⁷ Van Deusen, *Between the Sacred and the Worldly*, and Mónica Díaz, *Indigenous Writing from the Convent: Negotiating Ethnic Autonomy in Colonial Mexico* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2010), introduction.

²²⁸ Elizabeth Leffeldt, *Religious Women in the Golden Age of Spain: The Permeable Cloister* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), introduction.

²²⁹ Van Deusen, *Between the Sacred and the Worldly*, introduction.

²³⁰ Proceso de fe de María Jacinta de la Santísima Trinidad, "Denunciación y discurso de su vida," December 12, 1701. María marked this as one of the key moments in explaining why and

Montoya gained a margin of official Church sanction in their efforts. Further, it indicates a measure of parity between Montoya and Ayllón in that both the father figure and mother figure were asked to describe their own actions and their insights into the process. Further, the fact that Fray Tovar wished to disseminate their works as a model of devotion demonstrates how the pair had begun to affect communities outside their own and to become closer to the ideal that Spanish Catholicism held with regard to faith and race. Between 1674 and 1675, Ayllón, Montoya, and their *recogimiento* drew attention from Church officials in their lives and their community. As time progressed, they gained broader recognition for their efforts.

In 1675 the *oidor* of the Real Audiencia, a judge at the royal appeal's court in Lima, took a personal interest in their devotional efforts. He made a large donation to their *recogimiento*, allowing them to take in many more young women, expand their chapel, and otherwise reduce time spent seeking donations in the streets and focus on issues more pertinent to their devotional growth as laypersons of the Catholic Church.²³¹ This recognition from a secular official was a marked achievement, increasing their financial viability, and their efforts to garner support continued to bear fruit, allowing them to expand their project. That expansion presented new challenges and opportunities. The first challenge was that of nomenclature.

Transitioning from the first few girls in 1674 to a full *recogimiento* came with changes in language and status. First, Montoya was not certain what to call the girls within the language of the religious orders and that of her reformed relationship with Ayllón. Initially she called the young women her “little sisters” (*hermanitas*). This calls to mind the language of the religious orders, referring to them as fellow travelers and mutual supporters along the spiritual path, but

how she came to write of her devotional experiences, a key factor in the investigation into her life and visions.

²³¹ Ibid., Denunciación y discurso de su vida: December 12, 1701, images 56–57.

also assisted in creating a sense of community and alliance among the young *indias* and their adoptive mother and father. This worked for the *recogimiento*'s initial efforts but changed rapidly as Montoya asserted greater control over the young *indias*' appearance and behaviors.²³²

Montoya decided that the young women needed a habit to connect them to the *recogimiento* in the public eye. When the women left the home to travel the streets to minister to the population or to attend church, they wore habits of purple, a color that Montoya chose herself as the color for the *recogimiento*. These habits designated their rank and demonstrated their affiliation to the *recogimiento* in a more direct way than simply traveling as a group, while also helping to solidify a sense of Catholic identity and community in the girls' minds.²³³ As before, this connection beyond the walls of the *recogimiento* served to grow Montoya and Ayllón's reputation and status within both the native and Spanish communities.²³⁴ The members of the *recogimiento* visually appeared to be more Catholic, more faithful, and thus "whiter" in behavior and dress. Montoya and Ayllón's adaptation of the *recogimiento* system and establishing of their religious credentials did not end there. They gained further evidence and support through a direct connection with the divine.

Montoya's position of being an *hermana* (sister) to the young women shifted dramatically as she and Ayllón began to experience direct interaction with God. Presumably impressed, and supporting her efforts, God informed her of the responsibilities and roles she was to fill in the *recogimiento*. Montoya's writing described this vision as one of the key and defining moments in her life:

²³² Ibid., "Discurso de su vida," image 22.

²³³ Van Deusen, *Between the Sacred and the Worldly*, pp. 142–143.

²³⁴ Leffeldt, *Religious Women in the Golden Age of Spain*. Van Deusen, *Between the Sacred and the Worldly*.

God came to me and said: look upon this flock, which pleases me to give you. You are to watch and care for these women as you would daughters. You are to remedy their faults as a mother would. You are to love them as sisters. You are to correct and govern them as a prelate, and to teach them as a mistress. Watch over them vigilantly as a shepherdess.²³⁵

Here, Montoya expressed how she performed a variety of roles. She was to be a mother, sister, prelate, mistress, and shepherdess. These varied and layered responsibilities and callings in her life shaped her religious life and experience throughout her religious marriage to Ayllón and the raising of their spiritual family. They defined how she came to be a public figure of significant renown who taught and advised the young *indias* of Lima as a spiritual mother.

From this array of roles, Montoya's station in the *recogimiento*, and in the broader religious community in Lima, took shape: she was a guardian and shepherd of the souls of the native peoples of Lima, shepherding them toward the white ideal. Montoya emphasized in her vision from God this concept, saying she was to be a "shepherdess" with a "flock" she must protect, shelter, and defend from the proverbial wolves outside the walls of the *recogimiento*: vice, sin, and, most dangerous of all, heresy, as defined in the Spanish Catholic belief systems. God sanctioned and permitted her a great deal of public influence and the capacity to take on a self-interpreted motherhood that included strong components of teaching, leading, and advising, roles traditionally reserved for men. This was only doubly true once Ayllón died and the entire running and care of the *recogimiento* fell to Montoya.

²³⁵ Proceso de fe de María Jacinta de la Santísima Trinidad, "Discurso de su vida," December 12, 1701, image 56: "Parecía a mí su majestad y me decía 'mira que es muy de mi agrado este corto rebaño, y así las has de mirar y cuidar como hijas y suplir sus faltas como madre y las has de amar como hermanas y las has de corregir y gobernar como prelada y enseñar como maestra y celar con vigilancia como pastora.'"

By 1701 God's appointment of her as a spiritual mother caused Montoya to give a great deal more focus to the guarding, nurturing, and teaching aspects of her role, changing how she spoke of the young women and of herself. As Montoya's narrative of her life before the Inquisition progressed, she emphasized a new language. Instead of *hermanitas* (little sisters) being the dominant endearment for her charges, *hijas* (daughters) became the term she employed most frequently. She reported, "I came to love them as daughters because of their virtue, fervor, and the spirit of God that spoke to them."²³⁶ Not "daughters of the flesh," these "spiritual daughters" were her responsibility to raise and guide in a good and proper manner, emphasizing motherhood, which featured teaching at its core, rather than sisterhood.

Teaching and leading by example in the devotional life and chores that Ayllón and Montoya created for their charges demonstrated their understanding that these activities were logical and expected of her as a spiritual mother. She loved the young women as daughters, and because she loved them, she taught them the theology, words, and deeds of a life of devotion, drawing them ever closer to the ideal lifestyle of white Catholicism. And because they were *indias*, the Spanish and religious elite supported her actions in word and deed as well as financially. Montoya was their prelate and mistress as she dressed them and took them to public events and gatherings. She taught them actions, prayers, and manners of thought to draw them closer to God. Finally, she was a shepherdess as she watched over her "flock," guiding them and chastising them should they live without "punctuality" to their devotional lessons and practices or should they seek to poison her flock from within. She guided and shaped the private

²³⁶ Ibid.: "A las cuales ama las como hijas por su virtud y con el fervor y espíritu que Dios les había comunicado."

devotional lives of the *recogimiento* for the benefit of the faith and the spiritual health of young *indias* in Lima.²³⁷

At the same time as their visions began (1675), the pair experienced the first of their miracles, marking a new stage in their devotional experience and reputation. In their continued efforts to make their home and *recogimiento* into a greater religious and devotional space, they endeavored to build a chapel as an addition onto the original structure. Members of the community donated building materials, and Montoya and her charges purchased what they could with their alms. Even so, the supplies began to run short as the inexperienced crew of the *recogimiento*'s denizens at times suffered losses resulting from mishandling of the project and materials. One day, they recognized that the remaining bricks would not be enough to finish the chapel but endeavored to complete as much as possible in the hopes of a future donation. It was then that God made his first overt contribution to their lives. Upon returning to work following the midday meal, Montoya and her charges discovered that the number of bricks in the construction yard had doubled. They claimed it as a miracle and evidence of God favoring their endeavor and lifestyle, and soon so did the community at large.²³⁸

This miracle is somewhat different from those of the other spiritual mothers and Montoya's own contemporaries. Van Deusen and Schlau have compared the place of a female visionary to a vessel or "text," as van Deusen claimed, upon which the word and will of God were written and expressed. These authors argued that the culture of the time placed the famous

²³⁷ Ibid., "Denunciación y discurso de su vida," December 12, 1701, images 56–57.

²³⁸ Ibid. María Jacinta goes to great lengths to describe this miracle. She included an interview with the *fiscal* of the Real Audiencia of Lima, insisting he swore he had not done it. Furthermore, she described how all credit was given to God, not to themselves. This miracle was also among the miracles cited as evidence for Nicolás de Dios' sainthood.

visionaries of Spanish America—Rosa of Lima, Luisa Melgarejo, Angela Carranza (more about her later), and Montoya—in a passive position. In this particular instance, the miracle is associated with direct actions and efforts that Montoya, Ayllón, and their charges were undertaking, rather than the word being imparted to them.²³⁹ Further, the community spoke of how Montoya was able to miraculously heal the sick and injured, fostering the connections in the communal understanding to her own agency, divine favor, and femininity, which make up the active potency of spiritual motherhood.²⁴⁰ Thus, God demonstrated that Montoya was an actively blessed spiritual mother, receiving gifts God gave only to his most devoted, holy, and white servants. Further, Montoya experienced encounters with angels and demons and received direct communications from God that emphasized her favored status in her, the *recogimiento*'s, and the communities' minds, something she was encouraged to share in ever greater detail with broader audiences.

As Montoya wrote and spoke about her experience, she, and the community in general, saw this as a gift from God to a faithful servant and a service to the people (of all races) of Lima, and even beyond. Montoya was called upon to extend her motherhood and lessons to a broader audience through writing. She reported, “[My Spiritual] Father Fray Pedro Tovar of the order of Saint Augustine was my confessor. He gave to us paternal love, assistance, and care, and it was by his order, which I obeyed, that I began to write the journal of my life and visions.”²⁴¹

²³⁹ Van Deusen, ““In so celestial a language,”” pp. 69–74. Schlau, “Angela Carranza, Would-Be Theologian,” pp. 68–72.

²⁴⁰ Proceso de Fe de María Jacinta de la Santísima Trinidad, “Discurso de su vida,” December 12, 1701. Bernardo Sartalo, *Vida admirable y muerte prodigiosa de Nicolás de Ayllón*.

²⁴¹ Proceso de fe de María Jacinta de la Santísima Trinidad, “Discurso de su vida,” December 12, 1701. She frequently referred to him as “mi padre espiritual”: “Padre Maestro Fray Pedro Tovar del orden de San Agustín, quien nos daba paternal amor, asistencia, y cuidado, y por su orden y obediencia empecé a escribir un cuaderno de a cuarto que yo llamé de las Misericordias de Dios,

Montoya went on to describe how Fray Tovar had convinced her that she did not need more oversight for her writing than his alone as she was so virtuous as to merit immediate publication and dissemination among his and the other religious orders throughout the viceroyalty, not just Lima.²⁴² Her confessor wished her good example to be spread far and wide. Thus, she had gained the official sanction of a paternalistic Church force, boosting her authority and reputation in the Catholic community.

These visions and miracles, added to the list of divine gifts, became essential components of Montoya's and Ayllón's identities and growing status throughout the region. Further, this signals a marked transition for Montoya from a spiritual guide, with a goal to shelter and educate, to a spiritual font of information, receiving gifts and visions directly from God. Both within the *recogimiento* and in the community, this is an essential moment in understanding Montoya's growing role as a spiritual mother to those in her care, regardless of where the visions and gifts ultimately originated. Her supporters in the community (both lay and religious), her husband, her confessor, those in her care, and she herself believed that God favored her and her efforts alongside Ayllón. While these visions and experiences were mild compared to those she experienced later in life, they mark the clear establishment of authoritative religious and spiritual credentials that cement the image of Montoya as a spiritual mother, and one whose position was generally secure throughout her lifetime.

porque eran tan grandes y tan especiales a mi parecer las que entonces estamos recibiendo que lo [que] me dijo empecé [a] escribir y en la primera hoja de él está asentado el año, mes, y día que por ahora no me acuerdo; y habiendo pasado los ojos por este cuaderno el dicho Padre ... me dijo que prosiguiese asenta[n]do las dichas misericordias y grandezas de la divina Providencia en quien teníamos toda nuestra confianza.”

²⁴² Ibid., pp. 54–57.

The *Recogimiento* after Ayllón:

In November 1677 Ayllón died after a prolonged illness. The public outpouring in support of the pious man ensured that Ayllón's *vida* and exploits were published in 1684. A popular movement began to make him a saint in the Catholic canon; the native population believed they had found a man who fit the accepted models of white Catholic virtue and who could become a saint. The archbishop of Lima, Don Melchor Liñán y Cisneros, began his investigations into Ayllón's life and miracles in response to this popular surge. Naturally, Ayllón's death greatly affected Montoya's own position and responsibilities. She supported his beatification process with her own visions and accounts of his miracles, experiences, and deeds. However, beatifications were political and time-consuming affairs, and she had to run the *recogimiento* in addition to her other goals and duties.²⁴³ It was only after the death of Ayllón that we see Montoya taking on her fullest status as spiritual mother in the *recogimiento* and the religious community of Lima, now including the more traditional role associated with convents, that of the abbess or mother superior.

Montoya's life without Ayllón was as successful as it had been with him. Her primary goals following her husband's death were his beatification and the transformation of the *recogimiento* into a convent, preferably of the Carmelite order.²⁴⁴ She ran the *recogimiento* as its *madre* (mother) until her death in 1711. During her tenure as the *recogimiento*'s authority figure, she continued to write books on her systems of devotion, visions, and experiences. She continued

²⁴³ Van Deusen, *Between the Sacred and the Worldly*, pp. 142–143. Proceso de Fe de María Jacinta de la Santísima Trinidad, “Discurso de su vida,” December 12, 1701, images 57–60. Sartalo, *Vida admirable y muerte prodigiosa de Nicolás de Ayllón*.

²⁴⁴ María Jacinta made it clear throughout her trial that she was hoping the *recogimiento* would become part of the Carmelite order.

to take in young women and teach them the devotional life. She persisted in her applications for converting her beloved *recogimiento* into a convent, achieving a license from the Capuchin order in 1697. The complete transformation from a *recogimiento* and religious school to a convent did not occur until after Montoya's death, however.²⁴⁵

In the 1680s and 1690s, Montoya reached a level of authority and status held only by the truly exceptional lay visionaries. Her writings were included in Ayllón's official *vida* sent to Madrid and Rome, and she advised and taught not only her charges but dukes, Jesuits, and other members of Lima's high society.²⁴⁶ She had gained official recognition from secular officials, Church officials, and the highest official of all, God himself. She followed the path of devotion and spiritual motherhood, which elevated her and her charges above the expectations for native persons, which assumed that they would have lesser faith and status. She and her charges behaved as white Catholicism would have them do, and this was recognized with financial, educational, and publication support. Her spiritual motherhood was a means by which Montoya could "whiten" her racial standing.

Yet it was during this same time that suspicion fell on Montoya and, posthumously, Ayllón for their questionable associations, as evidenced in the *vida* and the archbishop's investigations. The investigations into Montoya's conduct, visions, raptures, spiritual visitations, and so on shed more light on the acceptability and position of women in the Spanish Empire who pursued a life path as a spiritual mother, as well as on remaining racial tensions associated with

²⁴⁵ Van Deusen, *Between the Sacred and the Worldly*, pp. 142–143.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, and Proceso de fe de María Jacinta de la Santísima Trinidad, "Discurso de su vida," December 12, 1701, images 55–58. She described how the Jesuits asked her to advise the Duke of Parinachocas as well as continue interacting with their brothers in writing and spreading her example.

Lima's society. While in the eyes of part of the ecclesiastical hierarchy and the Inquisition Montoya had transgressed expectations for a woman who sought to live a religious life, her devotional exploits, community support, and rhetoric of spiritual motherhood demonstrate that women such as she remained secure in their positions as the seventeenth century waned.²⁴⁷

Official Investigation and Inquisition Trial:

Examination of Spirit:

In 1696 the archbishop of Lima and his investigators became concerned with the evidence that the couple were familiar with Angela Carranza and her written works. Carranza was a contemporary of Montoya and was herself famed as a great ecstatic visionary throughout her lifetime. However, in 1694 Carranza was punished in a public auto-da-fé for falsifying visions, being deceived by demons, and making heretical propositions.²⁴⁸ In 1696 the inquisitors in Lima wrote a five-page report—possibly to the archbishop of Lima or the Inquisitor General in Madrid—that claimed that Ayllón's 1684 *vida* mentioned Carranza as his supporter and included some of her visions, which lauded Ayllón and proclaimed him as a great saint. She had visions of divine favor surrounding Ayllón and a vision of Ayllón skipping a term in Purgatory. For these and other dubious associations with condemned heretics, the inquisitors recommended that the *vida* be prohibited from being read or published, although Ayllón as an *indio* was officially outside inquisitorial authority.²⁴⁹ But Montoya and Ayllón both purported to perform

²⁴⁷ Gabriella Zarri, "From Prophecy to Discipline, 1450–1650," in *Women and Faith: Catholic Religious Life in Italy from Late Antiquity to the Present*. Lucetta Scaraffia and Gabriella Zarri, eds. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 83–113.

²⁴⁸ Schlau, "Angela Carranza, Would-Be Theologian," pp. 68–72. Iwasaki Cauti, "Mujeres al borde de la perfección," pp. 581–613.

²⁴⁹ Proceso de Fe de María Jacinta de la Santísima Trinidad, Inquisitorial report, August 31, 1696.

miracles, experience visions, and so on and were closely associated with Carranza, and Montoya as a *mestiza* could be tried. Scholars have argued that from the outset the archbishop investigated Montoya to end the process of creating an *indio* saint, and that the entire effort was bent, on racial lines, toward using the Inquisition to discredit the evidence supporting Ayllón by trying and condemning the one they could, that is, Montoya.²⁵⁰

His concerns and goals in mind, the archbishop began an “examination of spirit” (*examen de espíritu*) into Montoya’s soul and faith. This formal interrogation into Montoya’s devotional life was a series of interviews, both written and in person, which carried the weight of the archbishop’s personal scrutiny, but not the weight of an accusation of heresy or even a formalized trial, as it was instead associated with the beatification process of Ayllón. In speaking with Montoya, the archbishop learned that her confessor and spiritual father had recommended that she write about her methods and visions for posterity and for distribution. Since Carranza’s writings and those of Ayllón’s *vida* were also suspect, the archbishop required Montoya to turn in her writings to him for his review as a part of this examination of spirit.

The archbishop, in his examination, focused on Montoya’s personal understandings of piety and any evidence that she had feigned her visions and miracles, as Carranza had. He searched for deviations from Catholic behavior in her role as the *recogimiento*’s *madre* and spiritual leader, interested in her comportment and her treatment of the young women under her care, especially as they were impressionable young *indias*. The archbishop scrutinized the source of Montoya’s visions, questioning whether demons had deceived her or whether she had falsified

²⁵⁰ Van Deusen, “In so celestial a language,” pp. 69–74. Schlau, *Gendered Crime and Punishment*. Van Deusen, *Between the Sacred and the Worldly*. Van Deusen, *Global Indios*, introduction.

them entirely. He revisited her role in Ayllón's beatification process and questioned her specifically about any associations with dubious characters like Carranza.²⁵¹ What the archbishop found was not to his liking and indicated behavior that was not in line with the established patterns of white Catholic spiritual motherhood.

From the beginning, the archbishop saw Montoya's life and actions in terms of their contribution to the beatification process of Ayllón. Without Ayllón, it is unlikely that Montoya's reputation would have been as great, given that he led her into the religious life. Furthermore, since Montoya was his wife and the mother of their children, the archbishop considered her actions an extension of Ayllón's as he conducted the examination. Thus, when the archbishop saw in her visions and subsequent actions promises of power, influence, and reputation, he suspected both of grasping at power they did not deserve. He included these doubts in his notes and submitted reports to the Inquisition.²⁵² This focus has also contributed to the historical understanding of the case. Authors like Schlau and van Deusen use this as evidence to support the claim that the archbishop's investigations into Montoya were rooted in his desire to prevent Ayllón's beatification because he did not wish to see an *indio* become a saint. They argue that race, the core of Ayllón and Montoya's work, was why she was targeted.²⁵³ Indeed, many of the archbishop's questions and investigations focused on Montoya's conduct toward her charges and her duties in the *recogimiento*, as the purported goal of the institution was to foster the physical and spiritual well-being of young *indias* in Lima.

²⁵¹ Proceso de Fe de María Jacinta de la Santísima Trinidad, "Denunciación y discurso de su vida," December 12, 1701, images 58–60.

²⁵² Ibid., Charges of doubt from archbishop, December 16, 1701, p. 58: "cosas que son heréticas."

²⁵³ Van Deusen, "'In so celestial a language,'" pp. 69–74. Schlau, *Gendered Crime and Punishment*, introduction. Van Deusen, *Between the Sacred and the Worldly*, introduction. Van Deusen, *Global Indios*, introduction.

The archbishop challenged Montoya's capacity to lead, to discipline, and to teach a moral life, when she herself failed to lead a life of grace, obedience, trustworthiness, and love. First and foremost, the archbishop did not believe that either member of the holy couple, Ayllón or Montoya, was divinely favored enough to deny their carnal desires and the privileges of marriage, and he concluded that their vow of chastity was a sham. The archbishop listed in his reports how he questioned Montoya about this vow multiple times without feeling satisfied with her responses. The archbishop highlighted the aspect of Montoya's self-described conversion we saw previously: "From that day forward, we lived as brother and sister, and although we slept in the same bed it was always as two logs."²⁵⁴ In the "examination of spirit," the archbishop asked her how this could be. She responded, "By the grace of God."²⁵⁵ Perhaps feeling he would get no further with this issue, the archbishop dropped this line of questioning and turned to other issues in her life and visions. Nevertheless, he included this as one of his key concerns about Montoya in his reports to the Inquisition, suspecting her moral virtue and thus her status as a good woman and a spiritual mother, as well as the whitening of her racial identity.

The second, and perhaps more severe, aspect of his suspicions of her moral character concerned the "incorruptible" flesh of Ayllón's deceased body, in which his investigation proved that Montoya had used her daughters to stage a miracle. As part of his task, the archbishop had the veracity of the miracles of Ayllón tested, and discovered that in addition to the damning inclusion of Carranza's visions, Montoya and the young women of the *recogimiento* had put candles and perfume in the room where Ayllón's body was—in the archbishop's opinion, to

²⁵⁴ Proceso de fe de María Jacinta de la Santísima Trinidad, "Discurso de su vida," December 12, 1701, image 55: "desde este día vivimos como dos hermanos que, aunque dormíamos juntos era como ... dos troncos..."

²⁵⁵ Ibid., Examination of Spirit, December 14, 1701, image 56: "de la gracia de Dios."

create the illusion of a saintly miracle.²⁵⁶ One of the archbishop's agents, a priest charged with this particular investigation, reported a horrible smell covered by perfume and interrogated the women, asking them who had placed a "casoleta" (small vessel, usually made of metal) with perfume there.²⁵⁷ Eventually, during the examination of spirit, Montoya confessed that she had placed the perfume there to aid her husband's beatification process. This cast doubt again on Montoya's overall status and trustworthiness, raising concern that she could have fabricated aspects of her virtue and visions in a similar way as she did with the perfume to bolster her own reputation and status. Investigating further, the archbishop questioned whether Montoya was a good mother in her treatment of the young women of the *recogimiento*.

The archbishop suspected that Montoya was not as good a spiritual mother to the young women of the *recogimiento* as she believed and confessed to the world in person and in writing. The archbishop viewed two actions as undermining her status as a *madre* to these women. He was appalled to discover that Montoya had forced one of the young women out of the *recogimiento* without just cause. Calling it "sacrilegio" (sacrilege), as it was in opposition to the concept of the *recogimiento*'s mission, the archbishop claimed that barring some mortal sin, it

²⁵⁶ In early modern religion it was believed that God would preserve the bodies of the great saints upon their deaths, filling the room with a pleasant, rather than a corrupt, odor.

²⁵⁷ Proceso de fe de María Jacinta de la Santísima Trinidad, "Proceso de Beatificación y Canonización," December 14, 1701, images 59–60: "Algunos testigos sacerdotes y seculares tienen dicho que percibieron olor de sahumero y cazoleta; y tiene un sacerdote declarado haberlo dicho María del Rosario como habían puesto casoleta; y que como asistente en la casa lo había sabido, y que le había parecido mal el hecho; y se advierte que lo dicho se lo hizo saber a María Jacinta para que se desengañase de lo que tenía escrito en el cuaderno que le había dado a leer a dicho sacerdote y que pasase esto así lo confiesa María Jacinta también hay quien dice, que le untaron ámbar al cuerpo difunto. Y por salir de dudas preguntada María Jacinta, si supo u oyó decir que pusiesen cazoleta el tiempo que estuvo sin enterar su marido, dijo que de ordinario se ponía cazoleta en el oratorio dos piezas distantes del cuerpo."

was Montoya's "profession, solemn duty, and obligation to guard these women."²⁵⁸ He also discovered that the young woman Montoya had expelled had done extreme acts of penance, including four hours of flagellation (*disciplinas*), fifteen minutes of smacking to the face (*bofetadas*), and many times eight and twelve days at a time without eating, which he considered an extreme expectation of girls thirteen to sixteen years old.²⁵⁹ These examples of a spiritual mother abandoning or mistreating her daughters were unacceptable. The doubts about her mothering abilities was only further complicated when he questioned lapses in the spiritual nourishment the young women received.

In his submissions to the Inquisition, the archbishop related that there were times when she would punish and discipline the young women by not letting them take communion for six or eight days unless they kissed her hand and denying them the right to communion for committing some fault was evidence of disobedience.²⁶⁰ For the archbishop this was a step too far and outside the expectations of spiritual motherhood. She had set herself up as a monarch over these women, forcing them to kiss her hand to participate in the holy rite of communion. This questioning of her motherhood, as submitted for the Inquisition's review, demonstrated just how central the issues of the spiritual family and female categories of responsibilities were for establishing a woman's credentials and allowing her to rise above her racial heritage. This was all the more alarming as these young women were *indias* and, presumably, had no other means

²⁵⁸ Ibid., Charges of doubt from the Archbishop December 16, 1701, images 64–68: "y que en profesión solemne se obligasen aguardar."

²⁵⁹ Ibid.: "de cuatro horas de labor de muchas disciplinas y tras ellas un cuarto de hora de bofetadas y de haber pasado algunas [veces] (todo lo dice María Jacinta en sus cuadernos) ocho y doce días sin comer [?] siendo continuos los ayunos ... olvidándoseles algunas el comer."

²⁶⁰ Ibid.: "... castigándolas con encierro de seis y ocho días, sin que ninguna comulgue sin que primero la bese la mano ... Negando a quien la parece la licencia de comulgar por uno o más días en castigo cuando comenten alguna falta..."

of learning how to properly live as Catholic female religious. Having found these issues, the archbishop suspected that demons may have been the origin of Montoya's visions and actions.

These suspicions of misbehavior would not have been enough to involve the Inquisition on their own, but the archbishop discovered more reasons for concern when he read in her book of revelations and visions that *something* had made her grandiose promises and that demons tempted her. The archbishop saw her vainglory and potential deception echoed in two of her visions and interactions with what Montoya believed to be God. For one such vision, Montoya had recorded, "God told me with much affection 'My daughter, I will assist and enrich you in my goodness. You will be powerful with me, and all the world I will place at your feet and you will be owner of all.'"²⁶¹ Now that God had promised to place all the world at her feet, she had to be able to continue to teach and pass on her gifts and lessons, as this was a central component of her faith and experience. God did not disappoint: "I could not doubt his majesty said 'You will possess the land of the promise of heaven that I will give you. You and your children will enjoy your wages....'"²⁶² One can perhaps understand the archbishop's concern upon reading the promises this unknown spirit made to Montoya, as such grandiose promises almost always came from malign spirits.

Montoya's interactions with "God" highlighted a favored status as a woman with manifold responsibilities in her roles as a spiritual mother. God promised to place all the gifts of the earth at her feet, a powerful promise and reward for the life of devotion that Montoya had taken on herself. However, the promise did not end there. Montoya's spiritual children would

²⁶¹ Ibid.: "Cargo 10: A hojas treinta y siete: entendí que su majestad me decía con mucho cariño, 'hija mía yo te asistes y enriqueces de mis bienes y serás poderosa para conmigo y todo el mundo pondré a tus pies y serás dueña de todas mis cosas.'"

²⁶² Ibid.: "Cargo 13: Hoja cincuenta: no podía dudar que me decía su majestad que pose[e]rás la tierra de promisión del cielo que yo te daré, y tus hijos gozaran de tus [*gajes* (wages)]...."

carry on and inherit the gifts of God that she had earned with her own exceptional devotion. The vainglory and promises inherent in these visions caused the archbishop to suspect their source and, thus, the content and source of all of Montoya's visions. The archbishop emphasized these visions, filled with issues of responsibility, obedience, and reward, as prime examples of why he suspected Montoya of being *ilusa* (a demonically deceived false visionary) and thus an inherently bad spiritual mother.

This doubt only grew when the archbishop read that not all of Montoya's visions and spiritual interactions had been with God. This interaction was concerning with regard to Montoya's spiritual health and capacity to lead the *recogimiento*:

Charge 16: out of a window of iron, I [Montoya] saw many demons in the form of monkeys... and one that was largest of body with great force was tearing the window, and the others were helping.... I asked the foul creatures "what are you doing?" and the large enemy responded, "Unfortunately, I must tear [the window]." And he let me know that that window signified this soul... that way I learned that my suffering was in the soul and the weakness was too great to resist such grand temptation.²⁶³

This interaction suggested that she was being tempted and, moreover, that she did not feel strong enough to defend herself against the temptations the demons heaped upon her. If this clearly demonic presentation of temptation made Montoya doubt herself, how then could the archbishop believe that she could resist a demon in the guise of a good angel that appeared in her visions

²⁶³ Ibid.: "Cargo 16: A hojas veinte nueve: en una ventana de hierro vi muchos demonios en forma de monos y marimondas y uno que era mayor de cuerpo estaba con grandes fuerzas arrancado la ventana y los de más ayudaban. Y viendo yo este atrevimiento dice que hacéis bestias malas, y me respondió el enemigo grande, a tu pesar la [he] de arrancar. Y se me dio a conocer, que en aquella ventana se significaba esta alma ... porque conocí que el achaque que tenía estaba más en el alma, y que la flaqueza era mucha para no poder resistir tan grande tentación."

with grand promises? With all this evidence, the archbishop felt certain that Montoya had to be an *ilusa*.

The archbishop believed that Montoya's visions represented some malign spirit's influence. Though she had good intentions, she was not a good spiritual mother and was in fact a heretic who needed to be removed from a position that could harm the rest of the Catholic spiritual family, and particularly the vulnerable *indio* population of Lima. The archbishop clearly saw limits on this visionary laywoman's capacity to protect women or teach on theological issues when she herself could not determine whether her visions were from God or the Devil. The archbishop expressed a much more dubious opinion of Montoya's ability to teach and lead a *recogimiento*, going as far as to claim she was outside the Catholic faith and should denounce herself to the Inquisition, which, incidentally, would allow them to investigate the support Ayllón had garnered. Yet Montoya's interpretation of her own religiosity emphasized her piety, devotion, experience, and capacity to mother the youth of Lima and claimed that she had adhered to the models of spiritual motherhood and white Catholicism. In the end, the Inquisition seemingly agreed with her.

The Inquisition:

In December 1701 the archbishop ordered Montoya to denounce herself to the Inquisition's tribunal in Lima. Unlike in a typical Inquisition case, Montoya did not herself go before the Inquisitors to denounce her misdeeds. Instead, she claimed that her responsibilities at the *recogimiento* could not be set aside and requested that a member of the Jesuit order deliver the initial documents of her case to the Inquisition. On December 12 the priest went to the Inquisition with the authority to speak for her. He carried a large packet of information to the

Holy Office. By December 14, 1701, the Inquisition had finished reviewing Montoya's first submitted reports, including her denunciation, the discourse of her life, and her initial responses to the archbishop's doubts concerning her visions' source. The Inquisition then sent requests to the archbishop for Montoya's collected writings and the interrogation records from his examination of spirit.²⁶⁴

The Inquisition proceeded to review the copious documentation throughout the month of January 1702. In writing to the Inquisition, Montoya chose a tone of self-deprecation, humility, and contrition, the status of a good spiritual mother seeking forgiveness for something she did not know was wrong. She employed language frequently called upon to explain how women, "being ignorant," would fail in the manner she had. This time, she referenced the expectations of obedience that would leave women ignorant of theological issues. In explaining her failure to know the source of her visions, Montoya explained that she had been unable to discern the nature of the spirit as malign for she was a "poor and ignorant woman who didn't know of such things."²⁶⁵ When prompted to explain why she took a vow of chastity yet continued to live with her husband, she stated that it was for "her own vainglory and that she begged forgiveness from the court."²⁶⁶ She used these two phrases to describe a great number of her actions and thoughts, in contrition and deference to the authorities with whom she interacted. But, more tellingly, where she did not use such language to explain her actions, she emphasized that members of the clergy had told to write her books and that ultimately the blame lay with them for any broader

²⁶⁴ Ibid.. Official Inquisitorial request, December 14, 1701.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., *Denunciación*, December 12, 1701, image 66: "una mujer pobre e ignorante que no pudo saber de estas cosas."

²⁶⁶ Ibid., Excerpts from the examination of spirit, denunciation, and "discurso de su vida," multiple documents and dates: "Por mi vana gloria y pido perdón."

corruption that may have resulted. However, not all believed that Montoya was truly as orthodox as she thought, or at least as she presented herself to be.

On the morning of February 1, 1702, the Inquisition's *fiscal* (prosecutor) recommended that Montoya receive an official censure from the Holy Office along with the command that she desist from reading and writing about visionary matters. She could, however, remain at liberty and function as the spiritual guide and guardian of the young women of the *recogimiento*. That same afternoon, the Inquisitors agreed and declared this the Holy Office's official determination in the *proceso de fe* as it stood for the time being. They commanded her "for the time being to not write more on the subject of revelations or divine favors"²⁶⁷ Nor was she to speak about anything that had occurred in connection with the *proceso*, typical of the Inquisition's efforts to keep all Holy Office documentation and matters secret.

On February 3, 1702, they sent their official command in writing to Montoya at her *recogimiento*, ending her case in one of the lightest ways the Inquisition ever did.²⁶⁸ The case was suspended without an official determination regarding whether Montoya's visions were divine or diabolic, simply ordering that she should stop spreading knowledge of them in any way to avoid potential corruption of her soul or others'. This is a vastly unusual case for the Inquisition. They never arrested Montoya, and they agreed to a trial by correspondence (for the most part). Finally, they left Montoya functioning as a spiritual force in her community despite some significant evidence that she had transgressed in the form of her visions and behavior. The

²⁶⁷ Ibid., *audiencia*, February 1, 1702, images 72–25: "Mandaron que se le notifique a la dicha María Jacinta que por ahora no escriba en material que toque a revelación ni sobre los favores e ilustraciones [?] que dice ha tenido o tuviese en la oración. Ni tampoco sobre cosas místicas hasta que otra cosa se le mande por este tribunal. Y así mismo no revele por escrito ni de palabra a persona alguna cosa tocante a lo contenido en su denuncia y papeles presentados en este Santo Oficio."

²⁶⁸ Ibid., *audiencia*, February 1, 1702, images 72–25.

question then becomes, why? Why was Montoya allowed to remain at liberty with what amounted to an inquisitorial slap on the wrist? The answer lies within her rhetoric, positioning, and community support and the fact that she fulfilled the model of a spiritual mother in the Inquisition's eyes; further, the investigations into Montoya's life had effectively ended Ayllón's beatification process.

Montoya was a spiritual mother with a vast amount of support from the *indios* of Lima and knew how best to demonstrate her faithfulness and repentance to the court. From the very beginning of the trial, she claimed that she could not come in person to the Inquisition because she had to take care of the *recogimiento*. Thus, from its very inception, Montoya's defense and position were that of a devoted mother and Catholic woman. Throughout her trial, she maintained this posture and demonstrated to the official ecclesiastical authorities that she was trustworthy enough to remain free and maintain her position of religious authority in the *recogimiento* and eventual convent. Montoya used the very position of the white(r) spiritual mother dedicated to her task to defend herself and remain at liberty.

Conclusion:

Montoya's case was suspended with an official censure from the Inquisitors ordering her to stop speaking and writing on issues regarding visions and revelations. Her case was not reopened, and Montoya died in 1711. The consequences of her trial and self-denunciation were far-reaching. Most notably, the canonization process of Ayllón was quickly ended. In addition, her arrest, and the confiscation of her writings on suspicion of heresy, ensured that others throughout the Spanish Empire who might have wanted to follow her example would not know of her life and deeds, curbing greatly Montoya's legacy of spiritual motherhood.

Whether or not Montoya's visions were real, and whether she was employing a rhetoric of ignorance and deference to the court just to escape punishment, is immaterial to determining what Montoya did and what others permitted her to do. She taught and advised those young *indias* in her life on how to live a good devotional life, and she understood her role as a teacher as an extension of her love for these women as a "mother loved her daughters."²⁶⁹ She gained renown for this performance in Lima, Madrid, and Rome through her own actions and those of her husband. Perhaps Montoya had greater ambitions of canonization for herself, as her husband was already going through the process, but her lack of enthusiasm in describing her husband's or her writing endeavors would suggest otherwise. Given Montoya's otherwise orthodox interpretations of her faith, it would be unlikely that she would push for self-canonization, instead letting her words and deeds speak for themselves after her death; just as the *indios* had supported Ayllón, they might support her.

Montoya understood her desire to contribute to the spiritual life of Spain's empire as a logical extension of God's will for her to be a wife and mother, and the various responsibilities and roles that followed as she participated in the religious life of Lima. She focused all her energy on supporting the *indio* population of Lima and forged her spiritual motherhood within that identity. Her interests and visions were not political nor particularly theological, except for her personal interpretation of her vow of chastity. Instead, one can see how her own focus was on mothering the spiritual lives of the young women in her care, and this granted her the greatest possible status it could as she interacted with members of society at the highest levels. Spiritual

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, "Discurso de su vida," December 12, 1701, image 56: "Como una madre ama sus hijas."

motherhood was a vessel to propel her upward in a society resistant to the notion of having a *mestiza* rise to such prominence.

Thus, Montoya's case underscores several important points that mark her as an exemplary orthodox visionary laywoman. Montoya represented the lasting contribution of visionary laywomen who would teach and lead as a logical, expected aspect of their role as women of the Catholic Church. Her interpretation centered on motherhood (in its various forms), but this was by no means the only way women interpreted their positions in the Catholic Church and gained the authority to teach, lead, and shape the lives of others. Furthermore, the seemingly forbidden acts of women teaching, leading, writing, studying, and shaping religious life were in fact much more sanctioned than has been previously described. Except for the archbishop, the men and women in this case believed that Montoya should lead and teach at the *Recogimiento de Jesus, María, y Jose*. Rich Spaniards donated their money, women joined the religious life, and, in 1713, the Capuchins officially adopted the *recogimiento* into their order. The lives and work of Ayllón and Montoya and the lessons they taught permeated Lima's society, not just passively, but often with strong support from the broader community. Montoya taught, and few objected.

Spiritual motherhood was another avenue by which race could be circumvented in the Spanish system. Montoya and Ayllón started from the strong position of Ayllón's *cacique* ancestry but still faced an uphill battle in establishing themselves as an acceptable extension of white Catholic society. However, their close adherence to the models of devotion and their efforts to bring other *indios* with them toward the white Catholic ideal provided them a great deal of upward mobility within that system. Montoya's life and actions demonstrated that it was not only the nuns and saints of the convents who could circumvent their racial status through piety and virtue. Montoya's spiritual motherhood was founded on edifying herself and those under her

care in a life that drew them closer to the white ideal. Spiritual motherhood was as effective a tool for reshaping their racial status for the racially different laity within the Spanish Empire's legal systems as were service to the king and membership in a religious order. Montoya raised her racial status and that of those under her care through her adherence to spiritual motherhood's tenets and models. Models of spiritual motherhood are thus clearer as she and her charges gained official status as Capuchins in 1711, solidifying their lives and efforts in the transition from the racially different *recogimiento* to a "whitening" Catholic institution for the native people of Lima.

Chapter 4: Spiritual Motherhood and the Essential Masculine Guide: Catalina de Vargas

All lies and jests/ Still a man hears what he wants to hear and disregards the rest.
—Simon and Garfunkel, “The Boxer,” 1969

Introduction:

This chapter focuses on the life of Catalina de Vargas and her relationship with her spiritual guide. The case of de Vargas illustrates another limit that existed for spiritual motherhood: the close personal relationship with a spiritual guide and/or confessor. Without a spiritual guide, a religious woman like de Vargas could not have achieved spiritual motherhood; her case in particular features a close bond between confessor and penitent above and beyond what was typical and provides insight into the power and limitations of this necessary relationship between a spiritual mother and her spiritual guide. De Vargas’s case shows unequivocally how crucial a spiritual guide/confessor was in shaping and shaping the life and career of a spiritual mother, and what happened when the relationship (or one of the members in it) failed. De Vargas’s life and actions demonstrate just how essential that relationship was in shaping a laywoman’s entry into spiritual matters.

De Vargas lived from 1681 to 1726. She was born on Tenerife in the Canary Islands but spent most of her life in Las Palmas, the archipelago’s most significant city, on the island of Grand Canary. The Canary Islands served as a crossroads in the Spanish Empire, the logical stopping point for ships setting out to or returning from the Americas. The isles represent one of the earliest experiments in Spanish conquest on their way to the Americas and feature a broad variety of ethnic groups: a native population, immigrants from northern Africa, and of course traders and conquerors from Iberia and the Italian Peninsula. It was and is a diverse and vibrant

place, long exposed to the tenets and beliefs of Catholicism, enforced under Spanish rule. It also featured its own tribunal of the Inquisition, which carried out spiritual/religious discipline.

De Vargas had a modest background, and this shaped much of her development as a spiritual mother. When she was quite young, her father abandoned her and her family for the Americas. Left to their own resources, de Vargas, her mother, and her sister worked as seamstresses for wealthier households in their community. Struggling to support herself and her family, de Vargas's earliest forays into the supernatural and the divine took the form of a case of possession. She kept it to herself for years until a jarring incident in late 1706 when a demon accosted her in public. This prompted her to request aid from her confessor and priest. Unsure of how best to handle this type of case, her confessor invited in an expert, Father Ignacio Rodriguez Bello, to take care of her and help rid her of the demon.

The first major transition in her path toward becoming a spiritual mother came in 1707 when Father Bello moved her to his neighborhood (where he presided as confessor at the local convent) on Calle de San Francisco, where she lived with various families and worked for them as a servant. De Vargas, then twenty-six years old, had begun to experience visions of heaven and hell, visits from the dead, ecstatic trances, and more curious events that caused Father Bello to draw her closer to him and launch her career as a spiritual mother. At this stage, she might be termed a fledgling spiritual mother. She was shoved from her private familial life into one of public display and discussion.

The second major shift came in 1710 when Father Bello declared her, at age twenty-nine, rid of the demonic possession that had beset her. It was at this time that she began to shine and serve as a spiritual guide and to become an example for her community. Father Bello brought her with him whenever he visited families, and he showed them, and imparted as gifts, the hair

shirts, chains, and clothing she had worn as relics; in addition, she spoke often of her experiences with the women of the wider community. She learned to read, and when she was too ill to visit, she would correspond with the people she had met. She demonstrated great acts of piety and self-flagellation in the public streets, becoming the spiritual mother of Calle de San Francisco. The last stage in her career began in 1718, when, at the age thirty-six, de Vargas became an independent spiritual mother and learned the extent of Father Bello's misdeeds.

Father Bello, as it turned out, was a seducer, a solicitor of sexual favors, and a rapist. De Vargas herself described how he coerced her into a sexual relationship while they were still working together. She also described how and why she left his care and service: she discovered that Father Bello had coerced, raped, and/or solicited many of the women of Calle de San Francisco, including many of the families they visited, as well as a black slave whom Father Bello had allegedly impregnated. De Vargas then became an independent spiritual mother, seeking out, advising, and caring for the women whom Bello had mistreated. Finally, in 1719 the Inquisition, based on overwhelming testimonies from the community, arrested Father Bello and accused him of heresy. The heretical acts of which he was accused were connected to his sexual misconduct. De Vargas, as a spiritual mother in the religious community of which Father Bello had been a part, ended up having the same fate as Father Bello. In 1720 de Vargas was sent to a cell in the prisons of the Inquisition, and this ended her career as a spiritual mother. This chapter explores the central issues of her relationship and behavior alongside the sexually aggressive Father Bello and the fate of spiritual motherhood—its impossibility in the community's collective imagination. While spiritual motherhood was an effective means to raise de Vargas into public renown and discourse, its rhetoric failed when she was taken to task alongside Father Bello, a failed spiritual guide.

Sexuality and hypocrisy were at the center of the case against de Vargas. Also important to her case were obedience and poverty. Her relationship with Father Bello demonstrates how spiritual motherhood was affected when the close guiding male church figure failed to maintain his own virtue. As scholars such as Bilinkoff have noted, the relationship between a female mystic and her spiritual guide and confessor was essential in enabling a nun to become a leader in her own communities. Using the example of Teresa of Ávila and St. John of the Cross, Bilinkoff demonstrated how the pair's connection allowed each to grow individually and as a religious team. Bilinkoff argued that this type of relationship was foundational to each's religious credentials and growth, and so confessors and penitents worked diligently to find and develop a successful relationship.²⁷⁰ While Bilinkoff focuses mainly on female religious, this relationship was also important for the laity who would become spiritual mothers.

Spiritual mothers depended on the presence, reputation, and guidance of their spiritual guides and confessors as much as any other female religious in the early modern period. A spiritual mother's career depended greatly on the advocacy and status of her spiritual guide. This is true of all spiritual mothers, especially those who gained fame.²⁷¹ De Vargas's life and case demonstrate this especially, because her career collapsed in 1719, when the Inquisition arrested Father Bello on charges of solicitation and hypocrisy. He had had sexual encounters with many different partners, both willing and unwilling, and the evidence was substantial and overwhelmingly corroborated by members of the community. The facts demonstrated that Father Bello had lived a life of moral corruption while simultaneously maintaining an outward persona of virtue and holiness. The Inquisition tried de Vargas on the suspicion that she had colluded

²⁷⁰ Bilinkoff, *Related Lives*, pp. 64–88.

²⁷¹ Haliczzer, *Between Exaltation and Infamy*, conclusion.

with Bello, had lied about her visions and personal virtue, and ultimately was interested only in personal fame.

Unlike in the cases of other spiritual mothers accused of faking their virtue and visions for personal gain, the evidence against de Vargas was somewhat mixed. From the records of her Inquisition trial emerges a story of an impoverished woman who had become intensely reliant on a man for both her spiritual and her physical health, her salvation and her shelter. This chapter asks how spiritual motherhood worked in this type of relationship. What level of personal responsibility for Father Bello's sexual misconduct did de Vargas bear? Did she feign her virtue or, as she claimed, maintain it? What do all these issues tell us about spiritual motherhood for de Vargas in the early eighteenth-century Canaries?

This case demonstrates the limits of relying on the rhetoric of obedience that was the cornerstone of a spiritual mother's relationship to her confessor. Obedience and deference to a spiritual guide were essential components in building the relationship and growing her career.²⁷² Yet, once one partner in the relationship came into question, consistent statements of virtue and service did not protect a spiritual mother from the danger of a failed spiritual adviser, and any sexually inappropriate act on his part had a bearing on the gifts God might bestow on the spiritual mother. Several of de Vargas's testimonies stated that she was emotionally, psychologically, and physically abused by a powerful male figure. As de Vargas and several witnesses tell the story, from 1715 to 1720, the man who had saved her life and presumably her soul had become a dangerously immoral man, affecting many members of the community of Calle de San Francisco. According to her testimony, and that of those that supported her, de Vargas was coerced into surrendering her sexual virtue to Bello but never failed to cease being a

²⁷² Bilinkoff, *Related Lives*, pp. 45–50.

spiritual mother to those around her. She defended her life and choices to the Inquisition, stating that she had simply served her community and obeyed her spiritual guide and father, Father Bello. Spiritual motherhood, while an effective means to achieve community renown and leadership, did not work as a defense under these conditions. In the imagination of the community and the Inquisition, God would not have bestowed any spiritual gifts on someone who engaged in any illicit sexuality; thus, such acts were proof that she was lying and a hypocrite, as well as a danger to their communities. Ultimately, de Vargas was found guilty in 1726 at the age of forty-five and was exiled from Las Palmas, Madrid, and the Canary Islands. After this verdict, her career ended, and she disappeared from the historical record.

Summary of de Vargas's Case:

De Vargas was born in 1681 on the island of Tenerife in the Canary Islands, part of the Kingdom of Castile. Her father worked as a soldier, and her mother was a seamstress. De Vargas and her sister helped their family by performing chores and helping around the home while also learning her mother's trade. When de Vargas's father abandoned them in 1694–1695, setting sail to the Americas, de Vargas's mother, finding their situation untenable, moved away from their home on Tenerife to the island of Grand Canary²⁷³

From 1695 to 1706, the mother and two sisters lived in Las Palmas, the capital city of the islands, and continued to work as seamstresses. They attended Mass, confessed regularly, and visited and gossiped with their neighborhood and community. De Vargas herself, now a young woman, continued to help her mother and confessed regularly to her spiritual father, Fray

²⁷³ Proceso de fe de Catalina de Vargas, AHN, Consejo de la Inquisición, legajo, 1826: "Discurso de su vida," June 1, 1720. All my references to the original trial documentation will be to the images of the digitized document available in PARES.

Sebastián (no last name provided) of the Order of Saint Francis (the Franciscans). But during this period, it became clear that de Vargas was to have anything but a typical religious and social experience.²⁷⁴

Beginning around 1700, de Vargas began to experience spiritual torments. She reported to her confessor having painful headaches as well as visions, both good and bad, in and around the community. She told him that she was seeing angels, demons, and visions of heaven and hell. At first, these were infrequent and relatively nonharmful. However, as the years progressed, de Vargas began to report them more and more frequently. She began to visit Fray Sebastián with increased regularity and confessed more and more often. In addition, her torments began to affect her health. She no longer felt safe, seeing demons in the streets and becoming afraid to take certain paths through the city to the Catholic Church. Finally, she claimed that she was possessed and was being tormented constantly.²⁷⁵

In 1706 Fray Sebastián, unsure of how to care for de Vargas, introduced her to Fray Bello. Bello was the president and spiritual guardian of a convent of Poor Clares in the neighborhood of Calle de San Francisco in Las Palmas. This was an official role among the Franciscan orders when they established a convent or mission. The president was officially entrusted with the role of disciplinarian and arbiter, ensuring that the brothers and/or sisters followed the order's rule. In addition, the president was responsible for ensuring good relationships with the community and ensuring that his charges were not behaving inappropriately in public spaces. This role, used frequently throughout the Spanish Empire, placed him in the position of caring for the nuns' spiritual lives and health and helping in the

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

selection of new sisters.²⁷⁶ Furthermore, Fray Bello had gained a reputation as an excellent exorcist, confessor, and spiritual guide in the community of Las Palmas and the area around the convent. Because he believed that de Vargas was genuinely possessed, he decided to work with Fray Sebastián to care for her and deal with her visions. Fray Sebastián would continue as her confessor and would work to rid her of the demonic influence. Fray Bello's methods were strict and regimented. De Vargas was asked to sign a pledge at the beginning of her treatment, swearing to all the saints and to God that she would obey Bello's orders, no matter how extreme, to rid herself of the demonic influence.²⁷⁷

Throughout 1706 and into 1707, de Vargas participated in regular exorcisms and acts of penitence, and her relationship with Fray Bello grew. In addition to the rites of exorcism, Fray Bello required her to fast, reducing her diet to the Eucharist and a small evening meal. He ordered her to sleep on the floor, often without a blanket, and to wear an iron crown on her head. In addition, she was to wear hair-cloth inserts around her waist as a belt and as sleeves over her arms. These uncomfortable acts of penitence were designed to rid her of the demons by drawing her closer to God. Fray Bello also instructed her to confess and take communion more and more frequently [initially once a week but (up from the average twice or so a year), eventually, every day].²⁷⁸

In 1707 de Vargas's torments continued, and Fray Bello took over all care of de Vargas's spiritual life, and even her personal well-being. He became her confessor in Calle de San Francisco, where he lived and worked. He requested that the Montañez family, who lived in the

²⁷⁶ Antonine S. Tibesar, "Constitutions of the Franciscan Province of the Holy Cross in Española (1538–1540)," *The Americas*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (Apr., 1957), pp. 391–397.

²⁷⁷ Proceso de fe de Catalina de Vargas, "Discurso de su vida," June 1, 1720.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

neighborhood of Calle de San Francisco, shelter and care for de Vargas in their home. They accepted, and de Vargas left the care of her mother and sister and began living in the neighborhood of Calle de San Francisco. While living with the Montañez family, de Vargas's torments continued, and the family experienced these events.

On several occasions, including a family wedding in 1707, strange events happened around de Vargas. She would become enraptured and talk of the things she saw. She would speak of the family's lack of piety. When objects began to disappear and reappear days or weeks later, or even transmute into different materials (bread into silver), de Vargas claimed that this was the Devil and the demons that haunted her. Furthermore, de Vargas would disappear at times, causing the family to panic and search for her. The Montañez family experienced de Vargas's acts of penitence firsthand. She would debase herself at their evening meals, asking on bended knee to kiss all their hands, in order to do penance for her unwelcome and unworthy presence in their household and to draw closer to God. De Vargas suffered, and they suffered with her, for in the early weeks of 1708 they no longer welcomed de Vargas in their home. Fray Bello had to find her another home.²⁷⁹

This established a pattern that continued throughout de Vargas's time in the neighborhood of Calle de San Francisco, where she moved from home to home, sometimes fully integrating into family life, as she did in the Montañez household, and other times simply staying in a room and instead frequenting the chapel in the convent of the Poor Clares where Bello presided. De Vargas rarely provided reasons for her moves, and witnesses from the households spoke most often about her behavior and her relationship with Fray Bello than they did about her

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, Josefa Rafaela Montañez, testigo en los procesos en contra de Fray Ignacio y Catalina de Vargas, April 11, 1720, October 16, 1720, images 106–127.

reasons for leaving their homes.²⁸⁰ What de Vargas does say, and what can be gleaned from a few witnesses, is that the residents of Calle de San Francisco would help her, but she deferred to Fray Bello completely on whether she should accept this. On one occasion, a woman, Inés Hidalgo de Sosa, offered her shelter, but de Vargas would only respond, “No puedo quedarme en tu casa sin licencia de mi confesor” (I cannot stay in your home without permission from my confessor).²⁸¹ On other occasions, witnesses claimed that Fray Bello approached them directly, asking them to care for de Vargas; Bello would call her “una mujer santa y virtuosa” (a holy and virtuous woman).²⁸² Thus, one can infer that it was Fray Bello who caused de Vargas to move, or who chose which homes she might enter. Perhaps she moved to spread the burden of her care and torments. Still, she moved frequently, for example, living with Josefa Lázaro from 1708 to 1709 and with Martin Naranjo from 1709 to 1711.²⁸³ While she continued to move frequently for the rest of her time in Las Palmas, her reason for moving changed in 1710.

In 1710 Fray Bello declared de Vargas rid of demons. While she continued to experience visions, raptures, and ecstatic trances, demons no longer tormented her. However, she did not end her acts of piety and penitence, and she continued to obey Fray Bello and confess to him frequently, often daily. Over the period of 1710–1720, she would live in five other homes and frequently visit and stay for one or more nights in many other homes.

In 1713 de Vargas’s continued religious devotion and relationship with Fray Bello caused him to begin bringing her with him when he visited the poor, the sick, and the dying, as well as

²⁸⁰ Ibid., “Discurso de su vida,” June 1, 1720. As well as witness testimonies from the community.

²⁸¹ Ibid., Inés Hidalgo de Sosa, November 11, 1719, September 28, 1720, images 18–26.

²⁸² Ibid., Doña Francisca de Cubas, October 14, 1720, images 221–229.

²⁸³ Ibid., “Discurso de su vida,” June 1, 1720.

those hoping for spiritual edification; he claimed that she was “un buen ejemplo” (a good example).²⁸⁴ He encouraged de Vargas to continue her spiritual growth. While he was speaking with those seeking his aid or wishing to confess, he asked de Vargas to speak to the women of Calle de San Francisco. She told them of her experiences, her sins, and her penitence, and of how Fray Bello, her spiritual father, had saved her. However, her advice, words, and behavior were not always welcomed. Several witnesses said that they did not like what de Vargas was telling their daughters: she informed them that their spiritual devotion and penance were insufficient, and one witness commented that “hizo tales enredos y cuentos con su hija” (she told such disquieting stories and tales to her daughter) on the subject of her and others’ spiritual lives.²⁸⁵ While some did not agree with what de Vargas had to say, others wrote to her, frequently engaging with the neighborhood *santa* (saint).

From 1713 to 1720, de Vargas lived in a religious community of women, where she participated as a daughter, sister, and mother. While perhaps the favorite, de Vargas was not the only woman with whom Fray Bello had spiritual contact. He frequently visited the homes of the residents of Calle de San Francisco but was also the spiritual father to two other women who suffered as de Vargas did, while also being the spiritual guardian and president of the Poor Clares. Alongside these other women—what the community called Bello’s “hijas de confesión” (daughters of confession)—de Vargas learned to read and write in the convent of the Poor Clares over the course of years. She claimed that she learned how to do this because Fray Bello would gather her and some of his other “daughters of confession” together each week and read scripture

²⁸⁴ Ibid., Doña Francisca de Cubas, October 14, 1720, images 221–229.

²⁸⁵ Ibid., Doña María de la Antigua Santa Fe, October 14, 1720, images 69–88.

and other holy or spiritual texts to them.²⁸⁶ De Vargas applied those skills to communicate with a broader audience even though she was often incapacitated by illness or fatigue from her extremely ascetic lifestyle. De Vargas did not report the content of her letters, simply saying, “Estaba en comunicación con estas mujeres” (I was in communication with these women), before listing members of the convent and the community and relating the rough time period in which they wrote to one another.²⁸⁷ Presumably, de Vargas and the other women spoke of their lives and experiences. Most of de Vargas’s life was wrapped up in her acts of devotion and relationships to Fray Bello and the community in general.

In 1715 de Vargas’s relationship with Fray Bello grew closer still. While she was living in the Espino household, people noticed that she had begun a sexual relationship with Fray Bello, observing that he would often spend the night with her and that they slept naked together. One witness even claimed that they undressed and got into bed with one another right in front of her when staying in her home for an evening.²⁸⁸ De Vargas’s sexual, personal, and spiritual relationship with Fray Bello was not acceptable nor tolerated in their community. In 1715–1719 rumors, accusations, and anger grew throughout the community of Calle de San Francisco, as many began to see de Vargas and Bello’s relationship as “propio de marido y mujer, no hija y padre espiritual” (appropriate only for man and wife, and not daughter and spiritual father) and “un trato ilícito” (an illicit deal with Bello).²⁸⁹ It was said that Fray Bello had had sexual contact with several women of the community in addition to de Vargas, and that he had solicited several

²⁸⁶ Ibid., Catalina de Vargas, “Discurso de su vida,” June 1, 1720, and “audiencia segunda,” June 5, 1720, image 23.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., “Discurso de su vida,” June 1, 1720, images 22–25.

²⁸⁸ Ibid., Inés Madre Hidalgo de Sosa, November 11, 1719 and September 28, 1720, images 18–20.

²⁸⁹ Ibid., Calificador de la Inquisición, “Hechos y Dichos,” Item 7.

others. The rumor and outrage only intensified when, in 1718, Fray Bello used his position to declare de Vargas a tertiary of the Poor Clares, renaming her Catalina de Vargas de San Pío Quinto (Saint Pius V).²⁹⁰ After de Vargas moved to the Poor Clares' convent, Fray Bello would often enter the establishment at night through the confessional and have sexual relations with de Vargas (while she stayed there for the last year of her spiritual career) and other nuns.²⁹¹

De Vargas, discovering the extent of Fray Bello's sexual ventures, left his care and broke all ties with him in April 1719. She claimed to the Inquisitors that he had forced himself on her and on others. She told them that when she discovered the extent of Fray Bello's transgressions (several rapes and two pregnancies), she had left him and encouraged all the other women to do the same. She told the Holy Office that she had not reported these crimes to them because she was caring for the injured women and believed that sex was not part of the Inquisition's work.²⁹²

The nuns, presumably, had less patience with these sexual/spiritual transgressions and denounced Fray Bello to the Inquisition in July 1719 for his solicitations. Throughout his trial the extent of the relationship between de Vargas and Fray Bello became apparent to the court. Moreover, the clearly sexual relationship the pair had from 1715 to 1719 as well as the witnesses' claims of "un trato ilícito" caused the *calificadores* to begin a file of testimonies against de Vargas. They drew conclusions from these testimonies and presented them as "hechos y dichos" (words and deeds) of de Vargas, recommending that she be arrested.

In June 1720 de Vargas was thus arrested on charges of deception, hypocrisy, and simulation of virtue. She remained in the secret jails of the Inquisition from June 1, 1720, to

²⁹⁰ Ibid., Catalina de Vargas, "audiencia cuarta," June 7, 1720, image 22.

²⁹¹ Ibid., Abadesa Gregoria de San Gabriel, November 11, 1719 and September 28, 1720, image 18–20.

²⁹² Ibid., Catalina de Vargas, "audiencia quinta," June 10, 1720, images 22–26.

February 5, 1723. During this time the witnesses in Fray Bello's trial were recalled and asked to expand on and ratify their testimonies, specifically targeting de Vargas's role. The Inquisitors found her guilty of deception, hypocrisy, and simulation of virtue and banished her from Las Palmas permanently, from the Canary Islands for five years, and from Madrid for one year. This is the last record available on de Vargas's life. It is unclear where she went, what she did after 1723, or when she died. However, her actions from 1706 to 1720 show a woman actively involved in her community as a spiritual figure.

De Vargas's case delves into several important historical questions. The main interest in her case was the relationship of confessor and penitent, a relationship that helped her establish her reputation as a spiritual mother but also, at the same time, limited her ability to defend herself from charges of sexual misconduct and hypocrisy. De Vargas's case shows clearly how potent the relationship she shared with Bello was as she grew from a fledgling spiritual mother, as a young woman beset by demons, into a fully-fledged spiritual authority.

Additionally, her case raises questions about religious purity, social understandings of sex and sexuality, and the common understanding of authority and jurisdiction. De Vargas was a spiritual mother who founded her personal and spiritual identity around obedience to religious authorities. Her life and case show how lay spiritual mothers, particularly the poor and uneducated, grew their careers and understanding of their role through their relationship to their confessor and/or spiritual guide.²⁹³ Moreover, her case shows how sex and sexual purity were ambiguous subjects to the laity and even the lay priesthood. She interpreted her own sexual encounters as not degrading her own religious purpose and virtue. Yet, when confronted with

²⁹³ Bilinkoff, *Related Lives*, and, Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), introduction.

sexual assaults on other women, she acted as a spiritual mother to shelter them from further incidents, recognizing that this kind of conduct and contact was immoral.

The question of personal versus social understandings of sex, virtue, and authority is further obfuscated in that once she was out of Bello's care, her new confessor told her that this sexual misconduct was not a matter for the Inquisition and that she had no obligation to speak with them. This confusion surrounding sexual misconduct and the complicated relationship she developed with Bello from her earliest to her last forays as a spiritual mother make for a bawdy tale. However, through it all de Vargas maintained that she was a pure woman with only the intention of serving God, the Catholic faith, and her community: a spiritual mother. Ultimately, de Vargas's case demonstrates the existence of a firm divide between individual and institutional understandings of sexual purity and religious authority. In de Vargas's mind, she was a pure woman, despite having had multiple sexual encounters with Fray Bello. Fray Bello and other religious authorities in her life demonstrated a lack of understanding of what sexual misconduct was and who should investigate this if it occurred. Finally, the Inquisition demonstrated unequivocally that, to them, a woman's sexual virtue was paramount with regard to her ability to be a spiritual mother. Spiritual mothers' virtue and authority were inextricably wrapped in the virtue and authority of their confessors and spiritual guides. The depth of this connection became clear through the various stages of de Vargas's life.

The Early Years: 1695–1706:

For de Vargas, the early years of her spiritual development were personal and private, known to her, her family, and her confessors and spiritual guides. It was not until much later that she became the subject of public debate and concern. This first phase of her life as a spiritual

figure and mother largely involved building a relationship with a spiritual guide and confessor who could and would care for her in the manner she needed. Fray Bello, while not the first authority to guide her, would be that man. These first years of her spiritual growth were foundational as they established her pattern of obedience to church authorities and to Fray Bello in particular. This obedience and trust would be the cornerstone of de Vargas's career, as they were for many successful spiritual leaders throughout the early modern period.²⁹⁴ It was through obedience, deference, and a religious lifestyle that de Vargas believed her soul would be saved. Her initial ambitions in spiritual matters were personal, but that would change by the end of this period.

De Vargas's earliest years in Las Palmas passed uneventfully. She, her sister, and her mother worked together as seamstresses to support themselves. They lived a life of typical piety and religious experience, attending Mass, taking communion, and confessing regularly, at least three to four times a month. Her regular confessor was Fray Sebastián of the Franciscan order. Their relationship was reflective of the frequency of her visits. They knew each other in her early life, but not as she would in the years to come.²⁹⁵ It was not until de Vargas was in her twenties (in 1700–1710) that she began to have a religious experience atypical of the majority of Catholics throughout the Spanish Empire.

De Vargas's earliest experiences with the supernatural were with demons and temptation. She stated that she was unsure of the exact date when this began, but sometime in her twenties she began to see and notice demons throughout her daily life. She claimed that these demons would most often appear on her way to church, where she would take communion and hear

²⁹⁴ Bilinkoff, *Related Lives*, introduction.

²⁹⁵ Proceso de fe de Catalina de Vargas, "Discurso de su vida," June 1, 1720, images 429–431.

Mass. These demons would say “lascivious things” to her and would attempt to prevent her from reaching the Catholic Church.²⁹⁶ These “tormentos” increased in frequency over time throughout 1700–1706.²⁹⁷ In addition, de Vargas began to “tener visiones, oír cosas lascivias [y malas], de demonios y ángeles ... y a veces se arrobaba” (to have visions, hear lascivious things [and bad things] about demons and angels ... and sometimes she would enter an ecstatic trance).²⁹⁸ Unsure of how to handle this information, de Vargas kept it to herself, simply enduring the torments that beset her. She kept silent until she was twenty-five years old.²⁹⁹

Unlike the many spiritual mothers who noted pleasant encounters as their first spiritual and divine contacts, de Vargas’s spiritual experiences began as distinctly negative ones when demons (“diablos y demonios”) possessed her and tempted her with lewd and lascivious advances. And while other spiritual mothers encountered the demonic, they were older than de Vargas when this happened. Most were already spiritually developed and had also received more counsel and education from religious authorities by the time they encountered these malign spirits.

In 1706 de Vargas experienced a particularly violent episode that caused her to determine that she needed help with the demons and spirits that plagued her. She reported that she made this decision because one day when she encountered a man standing on a bridge on her walk to church, she became afraid for both her body and soul. De Vargas claimed that the man accosted her, demanding “lascivious things” and threatening to pitch her over the bridge should she

²⁹⁶ Ibid., Calificador of the Inquisition, “Hechos y Dichos,” May, 1720, images 400–428: “cosas lascivias.”

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ Ibid., “Discurso de su vida,” June 1, 1720.

²⁹⁹ Ibid., images 429–431.

attempt to cross to reach the Catholic Church.³⁰⁰ She was paralyzed with fear when she realized that the man was in fact a demon and that no one else seemed to notice his presence or heard the words he hurled at her. She eventually took a different street to avoid the bridge to the Catholic Church and reported the incident to her confessor, Fray Sebastián. The Franciscan priest, spurred by the unusual nature of this encounter, began to ask more questions of de Vargas and discovered that this was not the first incident nor even the most intense one that she had experienced. Discovering the full extent of de Vargas's religious experience to this point, he recommended that she go to one of their fellows who was known for his skill in handling such problems and for his skills in the rite of exorcism.³⁰¹

Initially, Fray Bello and Fray Sebastián worked together to care for de Vargas. The Franciscan exorcist Fray Bello had an entire convent and community for whom he cared in Calle de San Francisco, and he initially left her spiritual guidance, confession, and communion to his colleague, Fray Sebastian. Fray Bello, for his part, focused on a regimen that he believed would rid her of the demonic possession that beset her.

Fray Bello demanded obedience of de Vargas if he was to save her. He went as far as to have her swear obedience to his commands, with her very salvation placed in the balance. This was the header of the document as de Vargas recalled it:

I, Catalina de Vargas, promise to the Holy Trinity and the Holy Virgin and to all the Saints in Heaven, particularly Saint Francis, Saint Dominic, Saint Pius V, Saint John of the Cross, and to their guardian angels, by the witness of all the demons of Hell if I should fail to obey.³⁰²

³⁰⁰ Ibid., Calificador of the Inquisition, "Hechos y Dichos," May, 1720, images 400–428.

³⁰¹ Ibid., "Discurso de su vida," June 1, 1721, image 435.

³⁰² Ibid., image: 433: "Yo, Catalina de Vargas, prometo a la Santísima Trinidad y al a Virgen Santísima y a todos los santos del cielo, en particular a San Francisco, Santo Domingo, y San Pío Quinto, y San Juan de la Cruz, y al Ángel de su guardar y ponía por testigos a todos los demonios del Infierno si faltase a la obediencia ..."

She was to take communion and confess with Fray Sebastián and Fray Bello every day. De Vargas further detailed the acts of penitence and rules that Fray Bello laid out for her. He commanded her to restrict her diet to taking only communion and one small meal at vespers. He further commanded that she wear a heavy crown (*corona*) of iron on her head to remind her of the burden of the crown of thorns, and *silicios* (hair-shirt inserts) on her arms and around her waist to remind her that any comforts of the world were fleeting.³⁰³ This would open her more to contact with spiritual forces and guidance and separate her further from the worldly temptations and distractions that beset the majority of people. These penances and acts of extreme piety were commanded and carried out to draw out the demonic presence and expel it. Incidentally, these acts also drew her closer to the divine, and she began to experience visions and raptures more and more often, as noted by de Vargas and Frays Sebastián and Bello.³⁰⁴ Obedience and discipline of mind and body were the foundations on which de Vargas built her religious experience and developed her relationship with Fray Bello over time.³⁰⁵

Fray Bello took over completely as her spiritual guide and guardian between 1706 and 1708, becoming her confessor as well as her exorcist.³⁰⁶ His efforts and guidance shaped their relationship into one of father and daughter, as was expected between confessor and confessant. De Vargas referred to him at this time as her “padre espiritual” (spiritual father), and she claimed that he called her his “hija espiritual” (spiritual daughter) or “hija de confesión.”³⁰⁷ In particular,

³⁰³ Ibid., image: 432.

³⁰⁴ Ibid., Calificador of the Inquisition, “Hechos y Dichos,” May, 1720, image: 405, hecho 2.

³⁰⁵ Ibid., “Audiencia Segunda,” June 3, 1720, image 440, “libre de los demonios.”

³⁰⁶ Ibid., “Discurso de su Vida.”

³⁰⁷ Ibid., “Discurso de su Vida” and “Audiencia Segunda,” images 443, 445 and 451, and images 431–435.

she emphasized Father Bello's role as her "padre spiritual."³⁰⁸ To emphasize just how in command Fray Bello was of her life, de Vargas told how he commanded that she sleep on the floor without a blanket. She claimed that this was to prevent her from experiencing the comforts of this world and to protect her from harm when demons assaulted her or when she became enraptured. De Vargas surrendered control of most aspects of her life, even how and when she slept.

The role of spiritual father and daughter is typical of the women we have looked at thus far, but de Vargas was almost completely an inferior in the relationship. Unlike María Jacinta Montoya and Luisa Melgarejo, de Vargas did not have a significant role in determining her own lifestyle during the early years of her spiritual development. Melgarejo and Montoya chose to enter the religious lifestyle, while de Vargas entered it out of obedience to Fray Bello, seeking the salvation of her soul. In this way, Melgarejo's and Montoya's acts of piety and penance can be seen in a different light than those of de Vargas.

De Vargas then, must be discussed in a different way, for her religious experience is almost the reverse of what we have seen thus far. She did not become pious and receive visions; she became pious because she was receiving visions. Further, because her demonic possession was the first stage of her spiritual development, she became far more dependent on her spiritual father than either Melgarejo or Montoya did. While Melgarejo's confessor and Montoya's husband were essential figures in their lives, they did not loom as large as Fray Bello did. Thus, in the next phase of de Vargas's life, when she did become a public figure, it was not by her choice. The level of agency and choice strongly affected how de Vargas did and did not exhibit spiritual motherhood. Her spiritual motherhood, when it did develop, looked significantly

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

different from that of the other women discussed thus far. She began her spiritual career by forging a deep personal connection with and reliance on Bello, which shaped the rest of her life in Las Palmas.

A More Public Role: 1706–1710:

In this period, de Vargas's spirituality and authority moved from the private to the public. As for all spiritual mothers, that public debate and concern demonstrate several key aspects of spiritual motherhood and its broader utility throughout early modern Catholicism: the issues of female religious power as the community saw it, social versus personal understandings of spirituality, and the circumstances determining whether spiritual motherhood could and would be accepted in a given community. As in the case of Catalina Ballester, the assertion and acceptability of spiritual motherhood were shaped by the communal mind. Once a woman was in the public eye, personal and social opinion began to matter a great deal.³⁰⁹ De Vargas's case demonstrates how the community in Las Palmas, and particularly in Calle de San Francisco, worked to support a religious figure and how Fray Bello helped and hindered her growth into that figure. The opinions of the individuals in the community about the pair were interconnected: each's reputation and status impacted and shaped that of the other. Spiritual motherhood existed as a communal construction founded on personal understandings and opinions. De Vargas interacted with the public throughout this period, but her initial contact with them began through her connection to Fray Bello. It was his reputation that began the process of de Vargas becoming a spiritual mother to the people of Las Palmas.

³⁰⁹ Haliczzer, *Between Exaltation and Infamy*. Iwasaki Cauti, "Mujeres al borde de la perfección," pp. 581–613. Leffeldt, *Religious Women in Golden Age Spain*, introduction.

Fray Bello, having taken over all aspects of de Vargas's spiritual care, determined in 1707 to move her into his neighborhood on Calle de San Francisco. This was done in part so that he could spend less time traveling to see de Vargas; also, the nature of de Vargas's demonic possession and ecstatic trances required him to be available to come to her aid at odd hours. De Vargas reported that the first move, into the home of the Montañez family, also was done to place her in a fervently Christian home to provide a space of positive influence. Fray Bello, a renowned spiritual figure, as evidenced by his position and the deference of de Vargas and Fray Sebastián, requested that the Montañez family care for de Vargas's physical needs. Cristóbal Montañez, his wife, Josefa Rafaela, and their daughter, Isabel agreed to shelter and feed de Vargas in exchange for her service as a housemaid. Most of the time, de Vargas was a largely absent house guest, spending most of her time in the chapel in the convent of the Clares or with Fray Bello, being exorcized, confessing, or taking communion. On occasion Bello would visit to check on de Vargas or to help break her out of her *arrobos* (ecstatic trances) when the Montañez family could not or did not know how to help.³¹⁰ This was the first time in de Vargas's experience that her possession, visions, and lifestyle had become public. Immediately, opinions began to divide as to whether de Vargas was in fact a genuine spiritual figure.

Suspicious about de Vargas's spiritual claims were raised in late 1707 when the Montañez family hosted a wedding in their home that caused several members outside the immediate household to witness de Vargas's behavior and spiritual claims. During this event, de Vargas's behavior and comments caused serious consternation and doubt to arise about her and her motivations: whether she was truly possessed or just a sick girl. Preparing for the event, the

³¹⁰ Proceso de fe de Catalina de Vargas: Doña Jacinta María de Figueroa, November 27, 1719, and November 20, 1720, 44, and Josefa Rafaela Montañez, April 3, 1720 and October 16, 1720 images 106–107.

Montañez family discovered that a silver plate had disappeared. Concerned that it had been stolen, they searched for it but could not find it. Later, the plate reappeared inside a box of empanadas they were to serve during the wedding. This event had “escandalizado” (scandalized) those present, with the exception of one.³¹¹ Every witness who was in the kitchen when the box was opened reported that de Vargas quipped, “Aquello era el diablo que les hacía guiar porque no les hiciese en bien” (paraphrasing: this was of the devil because we have not done good).³¹² Later that day, some of the money that was to be given to the couple as a dowry/wedding present disappeared, only to reappear inside the clothing that was hung out to dry. Once again, de Vargas claimed that this was of the devil and that it had occurred because of the family’s misdeeds and lack of piety.³¹³ The descriptions of those who witnessed these events evidenced a sharp divide in opinion about de Vargas’s veracity and virtue.

Some, mainly Josefa Rafaela Montañez, supported her, believing what she said and knowing that she was struggling with possession. Josefa Rafaela Montañez declared that de Vargas “era buena Cristiana ... una santa ... y santísima ... mujer ejemplar y virtuosa” (was a good Christian woman, a saint, holiest, an exemplary woman and virtuous).³¹⁴ Two guests to the wedding, Ana María Pérez and Isabel Rivera, echoed this good opinion, calling de Vargas “una buena Cristiana” (a good Christian woman).³¹⁵ They went on to describe how, in the opinion of the community, de Vargas was a “santa mujer” (holy woman).³¹⁶ This indicates that at least some believed that what de Vargas was going through was a genuine experience and that when she

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, Josefa Rafaela Montañez, April 3, 1720 and October 16, 1720, images 110–112.

³¹² *Ibid.*, Josefa Rafaela Montañez, April 3, 1720 and October 16, 1720, image 120.

³¹³ *Ibid.*, María Lorenzo Hernández, April 20, 1720, images 128–130.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Josefa Rafaela Montañez, April 3, 1720 and October 16, 1720, images 119–122.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Anna María Pérez, August 8, 1720 and October 17, 1720 images 135–138, and Isabel Rivera, December 6, 1720, images 367–369.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*

spoke of the Devil harassing the wedding, there was indeed something spiritually amiss in their lives, taking her words as truth because of her spiritual virtue. Further, these comments show how de Vargas's words and experiences were discussed in the community, not just the Montañez family, and how some in the neighborhood supported her as well. However, this was not everyone's opinion.

The mysterious events during the preparations for the wedding, and de Vargas's curious words that followed, polarized opinions about her. Cristobal Montañez (the head of the Montañez household) and his mother made it clear that they thought that, at best, de Vargas was a liar and, at worst, she was actively involved in demonic magic. Cristobal Montañez openly called her an "embustera" (deceiver), claiming that her words and visions were an "accidente natural" (an accident of nature).³¹⁷ Isabel Rivera, while de Vargas's supporter, reported that Cristobal Montañez's mother told her that de Vargas was "una bruja y encantadora" (a witch and enchantress), and further that her "possessions" were in fact "un trato ilícito con el demonio" (an illicit deal with a demon) to gain powers.³¹⁸ Thus, not only did some not believe her, calling her a deceiver, but some even took her spiritual predictions and the events surrounding them as evidence of witchcraft. Almost from the very beginning of de Vargas's public religious life (1707), the community was divided in their beliefs about her good nature, a feature of every stage of de Vargas's religious experience.

After she left the Montañez household, Fray Bello continued to move her into different homes of the faithful throughout Las Palmas, certainly to shelter and support her, but also to keep her close to the convent, where he worked to support her spiritual needs. She lived in the

³¹⁷ Ibid., Cristóbal Montañez, April 8, 1720 and January 14, 1721, images 90–95.

³¹⁸ Ibid., Isabel Rivera, December 6, 1720, image 368.

household of Josefa Lázaro from 1708 to mid 1709 and in the house of Martin Naranjo in late 1709.³¹⁹ All of these homes were on Calle de San Francisco, indicating that Fray Bello continued to keep de Vargas near him to care and provide for her, while conflicts or the needs of the community required de Vargas to move with some frequency to different homes.³²⁰ Perhaps her possession was the cause of these conflicts, and perhaps the reason was simply economic in that those who had taken her in could no longer afford to employ her or keep her in their homes. Regardless, the pattern of her life remained consistent throughout 1706–1710. She lived in the homes of the faithful along Calle de San Francisco, she met Fray Bello to receive spiritual guidance, and she continued to struggle with possession, ecstatic trances, and visions. The major change from her previous stage of life was that the community began to weigh in on her experiences, with some doubting and others believing in her. Throughout all this, she began to have an influence on them.

Once again, it is important to compare de Vargas's experiences to those of the other laywomen we have analyzed thus far. Like all of the women seen thus far, de Vargas's life was structured on a religious institution that she frequented, in her case the convent of the Clares. Melgarejo, Ballester, and Montoya each had their religious institutions as well, indicating that this was an essential component of laywomen's public piety, a means to authority and spiritual motherhood. These public spaces were key to how debate began to surround these women. Their acts of piety in public spaces, in particular ecstatic trances, involved the community and its members in ways that may have been unfamiliar or uncomfortable, or that may have been

³¹⁹ Ibid., Inés Madre Hidalgo de Sosa, November 11, 1719 and September 28, 1720, images 18–20.

³²⁰ Ibid., Inés Madre Hidalgo de Sosa, November 11, 1719 and September 28, 1720, images 21–23.

fulfilling. Additionally, dissent about these women's veracity was a constant component of religious life in the communities in which they resided.

Unlike the other three women, who more or less had one home, from which they visited other places, de Vargas's unique religious experience demonstrates another way spiritual motherhood developed in communities. She went to people's homes rather than having people come to her as was the case with the other women. Melgarejo hosted parties for the visionaries of Lima, Montoya adopted young women, and Ballester held meetings in her home with her spiritual supporters. If de Vargas can be said to have had any home, it was the convent of the Clares on Calle de San Francisco, but she was required to depart when the chapel open for public worship closed each night, and she was often too sick or tormented to go to the chapel. However, all of that was to shift in 1710, when de Vargas changed from being a passive community actor to a spiritual mother directly involved in the spiritual lives of those around her.

Spiritual Motherhood: 1710–1715

During this phase of her spiritual career, de Vargas became the subject of a major public discussion. It was during these years that Fray Bello marketed de Vargas as a spiritual mother. Her sphere of communication grew rapidly, and she began behaving as a spiritual guide and support for members of her community with whom she had yet helped in living with them. She worked with young women of the community, telling them of her experiences and providing advice. Her spiritual motherhood blossomed into a network of communication and visitation in which she provided sisterly and motherly spiritual companionship for many in Calle de San Francisco and Las Palmas. Yet again, it was her close ties to Bello that allowed this to occur. He sang her praises, and she his, and with him she ministered to the community. Without Fray Bello,

it would have taken immensely longer for de Vargas to come to interact with as many as she did. Public debate and opinion continued to swirl around the pair, determining how and where they would be accepted and gain the power to act.³²¹ This period was not the most tumultuous in her life but certainly the most influential in her becoming a spiritual mother and a popular figure in Las Palmas, and underlying it all was her bond with Fray Bello.

De Vargas reported how in 1710, while she was living with Martin Naranjo, her religious life was forever changed when Fray Bello declared her free of demonic influence. De Vargas and Fray Bello's years of effort and pain ridding her of the demonic influence had paid off.³²² This marked a major shift in de Vargas's religious experience and her relationship to Fray Bello and to the community in general. Free of the demonic presence but still able to receive raptures and visions from heaven, she became capable of helping others and demonstrating the power of God and his church, as evidenced by her gifts and the fact that the clergy had been able to cure her. In 1710 de Vargas became an example of obedience and dedication to the Catholic Church (and to Father Bello in particular), and he sought to introduce her to as many people as possible throughout the city, especially its female population.

After 1710 de Vargas continued to move from home to home, but the community and the nuns of the convent, noted a change in how the spiritual daughter functioned. Most notable was the amount of time the pair spent together, as well as the level of devotion that de Vargas showed Fray Bello. During 1710–1719 Fray Bello brought de Vargas with him on his rounds through the streets and the city as he ministered to the people. While this may have initially been an

³²¹ Bilinkoff, *Related Lives*, introduction. Lehfeldt, *Religious Women in Golden Age Spain*, introduction.

³²² Proceso de fe de Catalina de Vargas, "Audiencia Segunda," June 3, 1720, image 440: "libre de los demonios."

extension of their father-daughter relationship, it was clear that the removal of the demonic presence had changed the way they interacted. In theory, they would no longer need to meet for exorcisms or for daily communion and confession, which had been prescribed to rid de Vargas of demons. However, de Vargas's liberation from the demons did not mark even a diminishing in the time the pair spent together, but rather an increase. De Vargas did not cease to see Fray Bello every day for communion and confession. De Vargas began working with Bello whenever and wherever she could and he allowed. If not with him, she spent time on the streets of Las Palmas and in the convent of the Poor Clares, continuing the acts of devotion that he had ordered. Indeed, Fray Bello decided to expand that influence by bringing her with him when visiting the homes of the faithful throughout his area of jurisdiction in Calle de San Francisco.

One of the key shifts in this period is the fact that de Vargas, though rid of demons, continued with her acts of piety, but by her own choice, not by mandate, to maintain her spiritual status and lifestyle. Truly, what else had she known? Instead of following Fray Bello's mandates of extreme penitence to rid herself of a dangerous demon, de Vargas now decided to continue meeting with Fray Bello to take communion and confess every day. Witnesses noted that the pair saw each other every day. This frequency was well outside the normal expectation of either communion or confession which was required once to twice a year for devout Christians in the early modern period. Initially, this did not seem to raise much suspicion or alarm, but over time it became more and more dubious in light of the pair's other behaviors. Indeed, it became one of the reasons witnesses found the pair's behavior, and de Vargas's specifically, suspect.³²³ De

³²³ *Ibid.*, Calificador, "Hechos y Dichos," images 405–407.

Vargas viewed this as an honest endeavor to keep her soul at peace to better remain free of demons and be able to receive visions and pass their wisdom on to the community.³²⁴

De Vargas explained that she understood these ongoing acts of piety and Fray Bello's orders as the "camino de la virtud" (path of virtue), connecting her divine gifts to her obedience to God through her spiritual father, Fray Bello, who gave her "buenos consejos" (good counsel).³²⁵ For de Vargas, obedience to the mandates of Bello, and, through him, those to God, resulted in two clear benefits in her personal religious experience. For not only did she draw closer to God through these acts of personal discipline and obedience, but she was rid of the demon that had plagued her. Obedience to God and his servants on earth thus made up a key part of how de Vargas, and others like her, was able to attain status as a spiritual font and receiver of visions. This pattern has been noted in each of the women discussed so far, and thus obedience must be considered essential to establishing a positive spiritual motherhood that was tolerated and acceptable in Spanish society. In obeying Bello, she gained much, and this would result in a pattern of obedient behavior once she left behind her demons and began making regular visits to the people of Las Palmas.

From 1710 to 1715, de Vargas became more of a presence in the streets and homes of Calle de San Francisco; as a result, the broader community took note of her activities, her public persona, and her piety. These neighbors primarily discussed whether de Vargas's piety and her encounters with the demonic were to be believed. From 1711 to 1713, she stayed in the home of Doña Jacinta María de Figueroa and her parents. De Figueroa was a young woman of marriageable age when de Vargas first came to live with her and her family. By 1713 de

³²⁴ Ibid., "Audiencia Cuarta," June 7, 1721, images 445 and 446.

³²⁵ Ibid., "Audiencia Cuarta," June 7, 1721, image 443.

Figuerola had married and moved from the family home but still lived in the community of Calle de San Francisco. Thus, she experienced de Vargas's pious persona, life, and actions from both an insider's perspective, living with de Vargas, and an outsider's perspective, noting how it affected the community's spiritual life and health.³²⁶

De Figuerola's opinions and reactions show how a detractor saw de Vargas's piety and position. Throughout her testimonies to the Inquisition, it became clear that she thought that all that had happened to de Vargas was not divine and at best a sickness. She did not call de Vargas mad, but she suggested that de Vargas's behavior and obedience to Bello, and Bello's shameless marketing of de Vargas as a saint, were evidence of a team seeking popularity and profit. For de Figuerola, de Vargas was not a spiritual mother. Instead, she believed that de Vargas's acts of piety, prophecy, and deference were faked. A spiritual mother had to be touched by God and granted authority through honest piety and faith. De Figuerola thus saw any acts, advice, or guidance that de Vargas committed or gave as suspect, hypocritical, and vainglorious.

De Figuerola's mother's testimony sheds a great deal of light on how de Vargas behaved during this period, and how that behavior was received, at least by her detractors. De Figuerola's mother reported that she had agreed to take into their home "una hija de confesión de dicho Fray Ignacio" (a daughter of confession of Fray Ignacio), because he had told her and her husband that she was "una mujer virtuosa" (a virtuous woman) and because she "estimaba" (esteemed) him as a pious man.³²⁷ De Figuerola respected his wishes and, with her family, took in de Vargas,

³²⁶ Ibid., Doña Jacinta María de Figuerola, November 20, 1719 and November 23, 1720, images 44–48.

³²⁷ Ibid.

but they became quickly disillusioned as to her saintliness, fearing that she was in fact a bad influence on Fray Bello, whom she respected as a “santo” (saintly/holy) man.³²⁸

De Figueroa reported on how de Vargas behaved during the two years she lived in her household, and how she perceived it as nothing but an effort to appear saintly and gain status as a result. First, de Figueroa reported how she viewed de Vargas’s raptures and ecstasies (*arrobos* and *tormentos*), which she had witnessed in her home and in the chapel of the convent of the Poor Clares. De Figueroa reported that she and her parents “nunca los tuvo por verdaderos porque eran de accidente natural por una enfermedad que tuviese” (never took them [the ecstasies] for true, because they must have been a result of some accident of nature owing to an illness).³²⁹ De Figueroa went into greater detail about specific actions that de Vargas took that caused her to doubt the woman.³³⁰ In particular, de Figueroa spoke of family meals in which de Vargas insisted on kissing each of their hands while kneeling before she felt worthy of joining them for the meal. De Figueroa saw these acts as disgusting and simple acts of public piety to gain sympathy and position, which formed her “mal concepto de Catalina de Vargas” (poor opinion of Catalina de Vargas).³³¹ However, these were not de Figueroa’s only concerns.

De Figueroa reported two separate events attached to de Vargas’s piety that concerned her and made her increasingly doubt de Vargas. Once, de Vargas did not arrive for dinner. The family sent a servant to look for her in her room but reported that she was not there. In a panic, the entire household searched for her but could not find her. It was only when they called Fray

³²⁸ Ibid.: “santo.”

³²⁹ Ibid., Doña Jacinta María de Figueroa, November 20, 1719 and November 23, 1720, image 46.

³³⁰ Ibid.

³³¹ Ibid., Doña Jacinta María de Figueroa, November 20, 1719 and November 23, 1720, image 48.

Bello to their house that they were able to find her. De Figueroa was walking past a window with Fray Bello when she saw de Vargas through a window, “arrobado” (enraptured) in the garden.³³² This caused de Figueroa to become angry (*enojada*) and “disgusted” once again. She believed that de Vargas had done this just to seek attention and to upset the family, and to force them to call Fray Bello to break her rapture and see to her spiritual needs.

Then, on a separate occasion in 1713 when de Figueroa was living in her new home with her husband, Fray Bello came to their house with “un eslabón, diciéndola [to Jacinta] era de una cadena que traía a la cintura por orden de dicho su confesor” (a link from a chain that de Vargas wore on the order of her confessor), telling her and her husband that they should “guardarse por reliquia” (keep it as a relic) because one day de Vargas would be a saint and it would be worth much to have and would protect their souls in the meantime.³³³ De Figueroa and her husband tried to convince Fray Bello that this was a bad idea and that he should stop being de Vargas’s confessor because she took up too much of his time and he was ignoring his other “hijas de confesión,” which presumably referred to nuns of the convent and the women of the community. De Figueroa listed a few of their names, the clearest being “Boticaria Candelaria” and “Isabel Atrapa Lozana.”³³⁴ These acts, which took place in her two homes, caused de Figueroa no end of concern and caused her to doubt de Vargas implicitly. However, de Vargas’s acts did not happen only in the private homes of others but also in the streets and public spaces.

³³² Ibid., Doña Jacinta María de Figueroa, November 20, 1719 and November 23, 1720, image 50.

³³³ Ibid.

³³⁴ Ibid., Doña Jacinta María de Figueroa, November 20, 1719 and November 23, 1720, images 50–52.

De Vargas frequented the chapel of the Poor Clares in the convent of Calle de San Francisco, and there and in the streets around the convent, the sisters witnessed de Vargas's behavior and words firsthand. Doña María de la Antigua Santa Fe, a sister of the Franciscan order, reported behavior she considered "extraña ... extrañamente" (strange and strangely), which she witnessed while de Vargas was living with her neighbor's family.³³⁵ In particular, Doña María cited examples of de Vargas running through the streets of Las Palmas carrying a cross. When she asked de Vargas why she was doing it, she replied, "Cuando Nuestra Señora y su hijo santísimo lo llevan a crucificar fue corriendo" (When Our Lady and her holiest son carried a cross to be crucified, they went there running).³³⁶

Doña María also declared that it caused others to be "escandalizados" (scandalized) and resulted in a slew of "chismes y cuentos" (rumors and stories) about de Vargas claiming that she did these things for attention.³³⁷ The detractors took de Vargas's actions to be impious efforts to obey Fray Bello and to gain attention and fame, rather than a true effort to be a model of spiritual devotion. It was this collection of suspicion and doubt that proved to them that de Vargas could not be a spiritual mother, as her behavior and motivations fell well outside the acceptable models of motherhood. This also cast doubt on Bello's actions and virtue. Bello's efforts to promote his "spiritual daughter" to the community failed. Instead, his efforts caused rumors that criticized them both. Oddly enough, while Doña María reported how others saw these events in the worst

³³⁵ Ibid., Doña María de la Antigua Santa Fe, November 8, 1719 and October 21, 1720, images 69–70.

³³⁶ Ibid., Doña María de la Antigua Santa Fe, November 8, 1719 and October 21, 1720, images 79–81.

³³⁷ Ibid., Doña María de la Antigua Santa Fe, November 8, 1719 and October 21, 1720, images 72–74.

possible light, her own opinion of de Vargas was rather high, and others agreed with her way of thinking.

Doña María believed de Vargas's revelations and treatment of her fellow "hijas de confesión" to be true, upright, and admirable. She believed that de Vargas had "éxtasis verdaderos" (true ecstasies) and that she was a "santa que [se] juzgaban por [sus] revelaciones" (a saint [holy] proven by her revelations).³³⁸ Doña María believed this to be fact. Once, de Vargas had predicted and told her exactly what would happen in Doña María's confessional and her experience in communion. When it came true, Doña María had seen de Vargas as having been "proven by her revelations."³³⁹ Her belief in this held strong throughout her years of knowing and observing de Vargas. For she further indicated that several members of the community, including the Espino household with whom de Vargas would live in 1717, had told her that she was an "embustera" but that she, Doña María, had never believed it because she saw how de Vargas behaved and believed her raptures and revelations to be true.³⁴⁰ These testimonies indicate the ongoing debate about de Vargas's private and public acts of piety. Yet the debates began to leave these spaces and enter many more homes and the convent's chapel.

During the period of 1710–1715, a significant change occurred in how de Vargas would experience community and religious life, in the form of "visitas a casas de mujeres" (visits to the homes of women) and "visitar personas afuera" (visiting people outside) in the community of

³³⁸ Ibid., Doña María de la Antigua Santa Fe, November 8, 1719 and October 21, 1720, images 80–82.

³³⁹ Ibid., Doña María de la Antigua Santa Fe, November 8, 1719 and October 21, 1720, images 81–83.

³⁴⁰ Ibid., Doña María de la Antigua Santa Fe, November 8, 1719 and October 21, 1720, image 85.

Calle de San Francisco.³⁴¹ While Fray Bello did not command her acts of penitence, he did decide to bring her with him as he visited and ministered to the people of Las Palmas. This transition, beginning in 1710, marked when she truly began to be a model of spiritual devotion for the broader community and not just in the homes where she lived. De Vargas knew why she was going with Fray Bello, for he told her she was a “virtuous woman that the people should see,” suggesting that her public acts and piety were a beneficial spectacle for the people of Las Palmas.³⁴² Thus, rid of her demons but still in possession of her spiritual gifts from God, she was a public example of how Bello had succeeded in raising a woman from a low point of demonic possession to a state of spiritual virtue, grace, and favor. Obedience, discipline, and example made up the core of how de Vargas became what she was, and what she would be.

Throughout her time as an itinerant spiritual figure, de Vargas focused on the women of the households. De Vargas would travel with Fray Bello, and while he prayed or spoke with the men or the one who had requested the visit, de Vargas would most often speak of her own experiences to the women and daughters. She would speak of her acts of obedience and penitence and how they had shaped her life and helped her escape demonic torment.³⁴³ This is perhaps the first true evidence of spiritual motherhood that de Vargas provided to the community of Calle de San Francisco. This growing network of women with whom de Vargas stayed in communication marks a move from a period of focusing on her own personal salvation, while she was possessed, to a period in which she actively cared for and engaged with the community

³⁴¹ Ibid., “Audiencia Cuarta,” June 7, 1721, image 433, and Calificador of the Inquisition, “Hechos y Dichos,” Item 8, image 407.

³⁴² Ibid., “Audiencia Cuarta,” June 7, 1721, image 434: “una mujer virtuosa que ellos deben ver.”

³⁴³ Ibid., “Audiencia Cuarta,” image 435.

around her.³⁴⁴ No longer was de Vargas simply speaking of her torments and experiences to Fray Bello and the households in which he placed her; now she was actively engaged in advising those around her regarding their spiritual development, a hallmark of spiritual motherhood as seen thus far. While much of what she wrote and spoke to people in her letters and visits was simply described as “cosas espirituales,” she did not limit herself to these forms of communication.³⁴⁵

De Vargas’s lessons, visions, and proclamations that coincided with her writing letters and visiting members of the community took on specific connotations: the crucifixion, the community, and the convent. Several witnesses in the community and the convent, as well as those who de Vargas simply visited, spoke to the nature of de Vargas’s more outlandish claims on these points. De Vargas seemed particularly concerned with Christ’s procession to Golgotha during the crucifixion, offering a great deal of detail on the subject when asked. As the reader will recall, witnesses noted that de Vargas claimed that Jesus went running to the crucifixion. However, this was not all she said on the matter. A visitor to Calle de San Francisco witnessed her kneeling upon entering the convent of the Poor Clares; when he asked the holy woman why, she responded, “Nuestro señor así la llevaba [la cruz] al calvario” (our Lord carried [the cross] in this manner to Mount Calvary).³⁴⁶ Similarly, several Clares and members of the community heard her claim that “[Cristo] sin violencia de los sayones y de su propia voluntad llevo así la cruz” (Christ, without brutish violence and of his own volition, carried the cross).³⁴⁷ These

³⁴⁴ Ibid., several witnesses, but for example, María Lorenzo, “mujer soltera que vive en un aposento en casa de Doña Anna de Cubas” (single woman who lives in a chamber in the house of Doña Anna de Cubas), images 184–189.

³⁴⁵ Ibid, Doña Figueroa, Don Simón Espino, images 260–267.

³⁴⁶ Ibid., Calificador de la Inquisición, Item 14, image 418 (as reported by a sister of the convent).

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

seemingly contradictory claims caused witnesses to report them as “extraña” and outside normal behavior.

Another aspect of de Vargas’s growing role as a voice on the nature of faith and religion came in the form of her opinions on salvation and how it related to her community. De Vargas explained that she had visions from heaven in which she saw her people divided into two groups, one in “batas blancas” (white gowns) and the other in “harapos” (rags), representing “los salvados y los condenados” (the saved and the condemned), and that in each she saw “miembros de su comunidad” (members of her community), taking special care to note those “que Dios las había librada” (whom God had liberated).³⁴⁸ Through this de Vargas claimed that God had revealed to her which members of the community were truly faithful, but her claims to community knowledge did not stop there. On other occasions, the nuns and members of the community reported her saying that “una [sic] alma puede salir del infierno por gracia de Dios” (that a soul could leave hell by the grace of God) and that she knew that some members of the community who were thought to be in hell were in fact in heaven because that was where God wanted them.³⁴⁹ De Vargas expressed her interest in the community in more direct ways as Fray Bello continued to expand her network and contacts.

Furthering a degree of separation in Fray Bello’s interest between lay and religious life, he began gathering around himself other laywomen like de Vargas. De Vargas referred to these women, such as “Boticaria Candelaria” and “Isabel Atrapa Lozano,” as Fray Bello’s “hermanas de confesión” (sisters in (or of) confession) among the nuns and the laity.³⁵⁰ De Vargas and the

³⁴⁸ Ibid., Calificador de la Inquisición, Item 13, image 417.

³⁴⁹ Ibid., Calificador de la Inquisición, análisis y recomendación, 419. (as reported by a sister of the convent).

³⁵⁰ Ibid., Doña María de la Antigua Santa Fe, November 8, 1719 and October 21, 1720, images 85–89: “hijas de confesión” y “hermanas de confesión.”

community in general did not make it clear if these other women were as contentious a topic as de Vargas and Fray Bello were. In fact, the other women were downplayed in the way the community and de Vargas spoke of her “hermanas,” instead focusing on de Vargas’s relationship with them. However, the community did take note of these women as a group, with several of the Clares noting them as a separate group of “hijas de confesión” that were outside the “clausura” (cloistered life), while members of the community also spoke of these women, noting them by name, and claiming that they met with de Vargas and Fray Bello in the convent but were not members of its direct closed community.³⁵¹ The focus given to de Vargas over the others seems to place her in the role of the eldest sister and senior of the group, for she made efforts to care for the women as part of her spiritual life, and theirs. The group’s relationship and actions were once again public events and caused many to take notice.

The daughters of confession with whom de Vargas became close and with whom she interacted demonstrate further the growth of de Vargas’s network of communication and spiritual discourse within the community of Calle de San Francisco. It was also in this period, from 1710 to 1715, that Fray Bello taught de Vargas how to read and write, which would only serve to continue this pattern of growth. This was done in large part when Fray Bello would call the “hermanas de confesión” together and read to them holy texts and the writings of the saints. Eventually, de Vargas learned how to read and write for herself and quickly made use of this skill in her ongoing relationships with the community in which she lived, supporting her continued interest in the community of Calle de San Francisco.³⁵²

³⁵¹ Ibid., “Discurso de su vida,” June 1, 1720; Isabel Rivera, December 6, 1720; Inés de San Narciso, November 3, 1719, images 367–369.

³⁵² Ibid., “Audiencia segunda,” June 3, 1721, and Calificador de la Inquisición, “Hechos y Dichos,” dicho 11, image 417.

De Vargas's visits to the community at large and her continued divine favor caused those who met her to want to stay in communication with her. De Vargas's growing status and influence can be seen in how, when she moved out or moved on from the homes she lived in or visited, she remained in communication with various members of the community through written communication; she reported, "I was communicating with these women: Doña Petronila Andel and with a daughter of Carlos Marcel, Doña María Ana, with Juana and María de Montes, and other she mentioned" in "cartas" (correspondence).³⁵³ The women that de Vargas listed in her testimonies were all women whom she had lived with or visited in the region of Las Palmas, where Fray Bello worked. Isabel Rivera and Jacinta María de Figueroa are both mentioned, and they also mention this form of communication that de Vargas practiced. De Vargas and women such as de Figueroa reported that the subject of these letters was almost always spiritual in nature, and they often contained efforts to guide and advise on spiritual health and development.

One of the more poignant examples of this came in 1713, when de Vargas told Tomasa Guillén that there was a ghost haunting their home. De Vargas, on one of her many visits with Fray Bello, this time to the Guillén household, was asked to stay overnight when Tomasa's mother noticed that de Vargas was bleeding from one of her self-inflicted wounds without the visionary having noticed this. The next morning, de Vargas spoke to Tomasa and her mother and informed them there was a spirit of a "negrita, una ama de casa," (a young black girl, a housewife or mistress of the house [?]) living in their home.³⁵⁴ De Vargas further claimed that

³⁵³ Ibid., "Discurso de su vida," June 1, 1721: "En este tiempo comunicó con Doña Petronila Andel y con una hija de Carlos Marcel, Doña María Ana, con Juana y María de Montes, y de otras que dijo." She says this at several points to indicate with whom she was in contact; images 437, 443, 432, etc.: "Estaba en comunicación con estas mujeres."

³⁵⁴ Ibid., Tomasa Guillén, May 28, 1721, images 132–133.

God “la enviaba para que se guarda[ra?] la casa” (sent her to guard the house).³⁵⁵ From that time forward, they wrote to de Vargas asking for her advice on the subject of the spirit “que nunca han visto” (that they had never seen).³⁵⁶ They also asked de Vargas to visit them again, including a time after Easter Mass when Tomasa remembered “rezando arrodillada” (praying on her knees) with her niece as de Vargas “hablaba con la ama de la casa” (spoke with the mistress of the house).³⁵⁷ These interactions represent one facet of de Vargas’s religious experience with her community, but a vibrant one that demonstrates how she gave advice and how she believed that she was called to do so. Further, it demonstrates how some sought her out for the knowledge and advice she could impart.

In her written and oral communications with the women of Las Palmas, de Vargas continued her pattern from her visits. She spoke of the devotional life, her sufferings, and her experiences, offering advice and counsel. She was able to provide a network of motherly and sisterly communication to the women of the city despite no longer living with or visiting the women directly.³⁵⁸ Thus, de Vargas, like Melgarejo and Montoya, used writing to continue and grow her networks of communication and spiritual influence, all of which Fray Bello supported, a fact that the community began to note with growing interest and, at times, agitation.

Perhaps one of the more irritating issues for the community in general was Fray Bello’s public, vocal, and active support for and interest in de Vargas, including her activities within the convent itself. The abbess, Madre Gregoria, noted how on one occasion around 1714, when de

³⁵⁵ Ibid., Tomasa Guillén, May 28, 1721, image 132.

³⁵⁶ Ibid., Tomasa Guillén, May 28, 1721, image 133.

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

³⁵⁸ Ibid., “Discurso de su vida,” June 1, 1721: “En este tiempo comunico con Doña Petronila Andel y con una hija de Carlos Marcel, Doña María Ana, con Juana y María de Montes, y de otras que dijo,” image 437.

Vargas had exited the confessional, Fray Bello had spoken of “su virtud, ... que la había ido a dar la comunión y le había parecido tan linda y más hermosa que cuando estaba fuera de dicha clausura” (her [de Vargas’s] virtue ... that he [Bello] had gone to give her communion, and she appeared to him even so lovely and more beautiful than when she had been out of the said convent).³⁵⁹ With these declarations in public and in the *clausura* (cloister), tension grew. These claims, alongside de Vargas’s actions and Fray Bello’s support within the convent walls, themselves only served to grow her reputation as a lay visionary. The convent, the community, and the crucifixion made up the core of her interests and lessons and were the focus of her attention; as before, they caused many to divide in their opinion of her.

As before, the acts of piety that de Vargas and Fray Bello performed in public spaces drew attention and debate from the community of Calle de San Francisco. Doña María de la Antigua Santa Fe related two occasions when she witnessed de Vargas aiding one of her fellow “hijas de confesión” by standing vigil over an exorcism and another instance in which she guarded a “sister’s” body while she was enraptured.³⁶⁰ Both of these events occurred within the center locus of community involvement on Calle de San Francisco, the chapel of the convent of the Poor Clares. Like most other members of the neighborhood of Calle de San Francisco, Doña Maria, a sister of the order, frequented the chapel for to confess and, at times, to view the acts of piety of the spiritual daughters of Fray Bello. To Doña Maria these acts were further evidence of de Vargas’s piety and devotion to God and to her fellows in the community and provided

³⁵⁹ Ibid., Calificador de la Inquisición, Item 17, image 418. (referencing the *claras* [Poor Clares] and the *abadesa* [abbess]).

³⁶⁰ Ibid., Doña María de la Antigua Santa Fe, November 8, 1719 and October 21, 1720 images 85–89: “hijas de confesión” y “hermanas de confesión.”

evidence for why she was a valuable spiritual figure in the community of the convent and Calle de San Francisco.

Yet others were not as convinced and claimed that these acts took place in public to further de Vargas and Fray Bello's goal of promoting their own fame. Inés de San Narciso, the *criada* (maid) of the convent who lived in the neighborhood of Calle de San Francisco, thought that this group's public acts were evidence of a "trato ilícito" (illicit pact) and stated that it caused a great "escándalo en esta comunidad" (scandal in the community).³⁶¹ Inés referred to these ecstatic trances as accidents and doubted that the gatherings of Fray Bello and his "daughters" were anything but underhanded and dubious, in the form of an illicit pact. She further indicated through the use of the term *escándalo* (scandal) that many people were speaking of these matters in a similar fashion. Once again, it is clear from the testimonies of these two women in the convent that the public acts of Fray Bello, de Vargas, and the group growing around them were supported by some and doubted by others, though the evidence for the doubts had shifted in the period from 1710 to 1715. Yet what this group's activities also indicate is a growing social network with Fray Bello and de Vargas at its center.

These acts throughout 1710 to 1715 and beyond mark a key component of de Vargas's developing religious experience, and an essential aspect of the spiritual motherhood that lay visionary figures carried out. De Vargas had become an active, sought-after, and encouraged spiritual adviser through her obedience to Fray Bello and her acts of spiritual penitence. This period (1710–1715) was when her communication via the written and spoken word had its largest impact throughout the community, and her actions were most welcomed, despite the ever-growing evidence of divisions of opinion among the community. She spoke to those who asked,

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*, Inés de San Narciso, November 3, 1719, images 176–177.

and those whom Fray Bello asked her to speak to, about her experience and the content of her visions. She focused on the issues of the community (both lay and religious) and the crucifixion, and she seemed particularly interested in questions of salvation.

De Vargas lived and experienced her religion both in public and in private with several households throughout Las Palmas. She stayed for stretches of time with several of Bello's flock and actively visited many of the others. De Vargas's spiritual motherhood developed and bloomed as she lived and prayed with the women of Las Palmas. However, it was also during this period that accusations began to mount, only growing more significant as a group of women with similar gifts or issues to de Vargas began gathering around her and Fray Bello.

The cumulative effects of her visits to others, her acts of penitence, and the lack of sleep that the visions and raptures had brought began to affect de Vargas's health. In 1715 she was placed within the household of Don Simón Espino, and it was here that the growing divide about de Vargas's veracity and piety became most visible, as evidenced by the number of witnesses from the Espino household who testified about de Vargas's raptures and the relationship she had with Father Bello. Several members of the household, including some of the servants and slaves, reported seeing de Vargas's condition deteriorate, and her raptures began to affect her at all hours of the day, not just when she took communion in the chapel in the convent of the Poor Clares. These witnesses and de Vargas reported many instances of illnesses and spiritual events: "estaba mala" (she was ill), "ella estaba enferma" (she was ill), and "la descubrí en un rincón de la casa arrobada" (I found her in a corner of the house enraptured).³⁶² The witnesses go on to report that her condition necessitated that Father Bello visit her at strange hours in order to help

³⁶² Ibid., Doña Lucia Espino, Doña Teresa Leal (her daughter), December 1, 1719, and October 12, 1720, images 257–261, 265–266.

her through the spiritual events. They further reported that they, in part, suspected that the visits took place at odd hours so that Bello would be willing and able to come, and they stated that he would often come, even uncalled, just to check in on de Vargas and that these visits increased in frequency while she lived in their household, including several instances in which he would stay the night in de Vargas's room.³⁶³ This, while also evidencing de Vargas's deteriorating physical condition, provides evidence that the public (i.e., the households with whom the pair interacted) had noticed a shift in their relationship. The amount of time and the nature of the time the pair spent together had grown suspect and became the focus of the next phase of de Vargas's religious experiences from 1715 to 1720.

Descent from Grace: 1715–1720:

This period of de Vargas's career and growth is characterized by a downward movement in both her spiritual authority and her relationship with Bello. Throughout this period Bello and de Vargas continued their activities as in the previous period, but during this phase sex and sexuality came to the fore. Underlying the rest of de Vargas's career as a spiritual mother are questions of sexual purity. The community defined these acts as immoral and eventually turned both in to the Inquisition for them. However, for de Vargas and, especially, Fray Bello, these acts were not the end of their virtue. Their relationship and reputations kept de Vargas's career afloat for some time, but, eventually, societal pressure demonstrated the hard limits on the social acceptability of their brand of spiritual motherhood. Issues related to sexual purity and her

³⁶³ Ibid., Calificador of the Inquisition, "Hechos y Dichos," May, 1720, and, "Audiencia segunda," June 3, 1721, images: 437–440, and 405.

relationship to Bello, a sexually impure man, brought about the end of her career as a spiritual mother to the community of Las Palmas.³⁶⁴

In 1715 de Vargas moved into the home of Espino and his family. It was here that de Vargas noted that a significant change occurred within her relationship to Fray Bello and, through that change, to the rest of the community as well. Fray Bello and de Vargas began a sexual relationship. To those who observed or suspected it, this new aspect of the pair's relationship either fulfilled their beliefs that de Vargas had been feigning virtue to gain the attention of the community, or proved the depravity of Fray Bello, as the community discovered the full extent of his "solicitations" and misdeeds.³⁶⁵ The community now divided over which member of the pair they believed to be virtuous and which one scandalous. The *padre espiritual* (spiritual father) and *su hija* (his daughter) were to be sundered on the subject of the great taboo for religious virtue: sex.

The Espino household featured strongly in this, for it was there (and several times afterward) that de Vargas and Fray Bello had sex somewhere around the years 1715–1716. De Vargas related that it occurred at night when most of the family had retired for the evening and Fray Bello took her aside into the "aposento" (dwelling) set aside for her. There, he told her that he desired her, and she responded that "she could not act because he was her confessor." Fray Bello responded with a heretical statement "that outside the confessional, he was like any other

³⁶⁴ Bilinkoff, *Related Lives*. Perry, *Gender and Disorder in Early Modern Seville*. Jantzen, *Power, Gender, and Christian Mysticism*.

³⁶⁵ Proceso de fe de Fray Ignacio Rodríguez Bello, Archivo Histórico Nacional, Madrid, España, Consejo de la Inquisición, legajo 1826: Calificador of the Inquisition, "Hechos y Dichos," December, 1719.

man.” With this excuse they coupled, and de Vargas lost her virginity.³⁶⁶ De Vargas described in detail only one other sexual encounter with Fray Bello, which takes on a slightly more sinister tone.

On another occasion, some months after their first sexual encounter, de Vargas described that during the *merienda* (collation) in the home of the Espinos, Fray Bello violently had sex with her in spite of her protests. De Vargas became alarmed when Fray Bello took her “to the same *aposento*” as before and there “took carnal access with her *con violencia* [with violence].”³⁶⁷ On this occasion she also related how when she would confess these sins (*pecados*), Fray Bello acted as if they were unknown to him and commanded further obedience and penance, in the form of the penances she was already engaging in.³⁶⁸ These events and their implications are essential for understanding what de Vargas felt, did, and experienced throughout her life and trial. The contradictions in Bello’s rhetoric and behavior upset and frustrated de Vargas and placed her in the confusing position of a holy woman obeying a man who took the

³⁶⁶ Ibid., “Audiencia Cuarta,” June 10, 1720, images 443–444: “Vivía entonces en la casa de Don Simón Espino: entrando esta en un aposento de la casa entró dicho Fray Ignacio traer ella ya adentra a la dijo que si respiraba la había de enterrar allí y luego sujetándola por las manos la dijo lo que lleva expresado queriendo esta dar voces diciéndola y previniéndole mirara era su confesor; a que le respondió que allí no había confesonario que allí era como otro cualquier otro hombre y tuvo acceso carnal con ella que hasta entonces no había cometido semejante pecado con persona alguna...”

³⁶⁷ Ibid., “Audiencia Cuarta,” June 10, 1720, images 443–444: “y de allí algunos meses después del lance han pasado, estando en dicho confesor en casa de esta confesante y de visita unas mujeres que no se acuerda quienes eran solo se acuerda de Doña Beatriz Espino, difunta, yendo a sacar la merienda para el refresco ... [and her confessor] diciendo iba ayudarla a traerla [the food], y entrando en el mismo cuarto del primer lance se entró dicho religioso y con violencia arrimándola a una pared tuvo acceso carnal con ella aunque previo la dejara que había gente en casa.

³⁶⁸ Ibid., “Audiencia Cuarta,” June 10, 1720, images 443–444: “y luego se hizo a la visita dicho su confesor y que estos pecados los confesaba y le decía dicho confesor los confesaba como si no lo conociera que allí estaba en lugar de Jesús y que se arrepintiese de los pecados cometidos y poniendo las penitencias que tiene declarado.”

sex he wanted of her, even if she tried to refuse. De Vargas detailed these events and mentioned that this pattern repeated itself until 1719. She explained that he would take “carnal access with her” against her will (*sin su voluntad*).³⁶⁹ The community at large noticed more and more suspicious behavior, further dividing their opinions on this “virtuous woman” and “her spiritual father.”

Predictably, the Espino household was the first to notice and discuss the scandal, first among themselves and then with the community at large, causing rumor and uproar, and eventually necessitating that they testify before the Inquisition. Don Simón and Doña Beatriz were displeased with these events in their home, noting how Fray Bello came more and more often and often stayed with de Vargas overnight.³⁷⁰ However, this represented mere suspicion in comparison to the testimony of those who walked in on the pair in compromising states. One of the servants in the household described a time when she walked in on them, finding them “together, which, in besides the scandal, raised the concern [*escrúpulo*] that a spiritual daughter and father thought to be of great virtue could be united in a manner that was proper for a husband and wife.”³⁷¹ This witness, and others within the Espino household, saw their relationship as inappropriate, citing their activities in her *apoyento* as more appropriate for a man and wife than a daughter and spiritual father. It was this sudden spike in the obviousness of their behavior that caused the Espino family to describe de Vargas to their friends, neighbors, and the Inquisition as an “embustera” (deceiver) and a “hipócrita” (hypocrite), for she continued to carry on with her

³⁶⁹ Ibid., “Audiencia tercera,” June 5, 1720, image 445.

³⁷⁰ Ibid., María Lucía Espino, December 1, 1719 and November 11, 1720.

³⁷¹ Ibid., Calificador, “Hechos y Dichos,” image 457: “juntos que a más [?] del escándalo quedaban ocasión el escrúpulo que siendo hija y padre espiritual ponderados de tanta virtud estuvieren con unión tan entre que era propia de marido y mujer.”

outwardly holy lifestyle.³⁷² Over the last few months of 1717, their discontent continued to build up, and they asked her to leave their home.

During a few months between 1717 and 1718, de Vargas would stay one night in one household and the next in another, increasing the exposure of her sexualized relationship with Fray Bello. She spent most of her time in the chapel of the convent of the Poor Clares when it was open to her. She functioned as a spiritual mother during these hours, praying, advising, and visiting her fellow “hijas de confesión,” the sisters of the convent, and the members of the community with whom she was in frequent contact. But in the evenings, she was limited to whoever might decide to help her. In effect, she was homeless, which reduced her status. In the evenings she was no longer a spiritual mother but a sister or daughter. Members of the community mentioned during her trial that de Vargas would spend a night with them infrequently during this period.

What this meant, however, is that Fray Bello now visited and spent time with de Vargas in multiple households, furthering the general scandal and rumor building up around them. One such host and witness was Inés Hidalgo de Sosa, who lived across the street from the convent. She reported how on a stormy night she saw de Vargas standing in the street as the convent was closing for the evening. De Sosa, not wanting to let a woman of whom she held an “opinion of virtue” and whom she viewed as “virtuous” stay outside during the storm, invited her to stay in her home for the night.³⁷³ De Vargas replied that she could not without the permission of her

³⁷² Proceso de fe de Fray Ignacio Rodríguez Bello and Proceso de fe de Catalina de Vargas, “Testigos 1 a 64,” October, 1719 to May, 1720. This is most clearly seen in the “hechos y dichos” section, images 418 and 419.

³⁷³ Proceso de fe de Catalina de Vargas, Inés Hidalgo de Sosa, November 11, 1719 and 28th of September, 1720, images 18–26.

“spiritual father,” Fray Bello, who had always made these arrangements for her before. De Sosa insisted on calling her “hermanita” and inviting her inside, but she had not expected Fray Bello to join them.³⁷⁴ Here we can see how at times, even as established as she was, the community saw her as inferior or as one needing protection, but as one toward whom they felt kinship and kindness.

De Sosa had done something charitable, taking in de Vargas, the “little sister,” and sheltering her, but she did not expect that “little sister” to invite her father along with her. Fray Bello arrived, and the two of them had a light meal with de Sosa, who then expected Fray Bello to leave and return to his own home. Instead, the pair disrobed and lay under a blanket on the floor together, all in front of de Sosa, who described that she could not believe what was happening but also could not force them out.³⁷⁵ She had heard rumors and scandals about Fray Bello and de Vargas, with some even saying that de Vargas was pregnant. It was not until this incident in late 1717 that she believed them to be true.³⁷⁶ De Vargas and Fray Bello’s interaction with de Sosa indicated another momentous shift in which the observable behavior of de Vargas and Bello changed their role in society, from one of virtuous and trustworthy individuals to that of hypocrites and deceivers. Outwardly the pair maintained a stance of lives lived with divine favor and piety, all the while carrying on in a manner most shameful, ignoring the fact that God would not continue to bless them. The final straw that broke the community’s will to endure either Bello or de Vargas came when he, using his power as the president of the convent, made de Vargas a tertiary of the Poor Clares and allowed her to live in the convent.

³⁷⁴ Ibid.

³⁷⁵ Ibid.

³⁷⁶ Ibid.

While the nuns were familiar with de Vargas, they had never lived with her and observed her private behaviors as had the rest of the now *escandalizada* community on Calle de San Francisco. De Vargas became a tertiary and changed her name to Catalina de San Pío Quinto in 1718. The nuns quickly came to learn why rumor and scandal about the pair had become rampant.³⁷⁷ The abbess herself, along with other nuns and members of the community, speculated about de Vargas's entrance into the convent and order as possible only owing to Fray Bello's influence.³⁷⁸ The abbess specifically stated that after de Vargas had moved into one of the *apostentos* in the convent, the full sisters began to report nightly sightings of an unknown man in the corridors. The abbess then reported that she had discovered (through coordination with the Franciscan priests with whom the convent worked in the early modern period) that the man entered through the confessional and that he had a key because it was not a forced entry. It was discovered that Fray Bello had been entering their convent at night to visit de Vargas.³⁷⁹ This fact, and de Vargas's own behaviors as an overtly spiritual person, caused the nuns to become quite irate, and the majority of them and their support staff believed de Vargas to be an "embustera," a woman "sin virtud" who had "un trato ilícito" with Fray Bello for self-aggrandizement.³⁸⁰ Rumor and scandal reached into the convent walls, and they became a part of the ongoing debate about de Vargas in a far more direct fashion.

However, the nuns and members of the community were not the only ones to learn of Fray Bello's sinful behavior. De Vargas was discovering Fray Bello's misdeeds as well. Even

³⁷⁷ Ibid., Abbess Gregoria de San Gabriel, October 23, 1720, images 338–339.

³⁷⁸ Ibid.

³⁷⁹ Ibid., Inés Madre Hidalgo de Sosa, November 11, 1719 and 28th of September, 1720, images 18–26.

³⁸⁰ Ibid., Feliciano de la Candelaria (servant in the convent), Inés de San Narciso (Poor Clare nun), Doña María de la Antigua Santa Fe (nun), Abbess Gregoria de San Gabriel, images 336–338.

though no longer living directly in the homes of the community, de Vargas continued to visit the people regularly, as she had done with Fray Bello, but now and again on her own. One of the poignant moments in de Vargas's life was when she visited the home of the de Figueroa family soon after Fray Bello had. De Vargas described how when she went to speak to the daughter of Don Lazaro de Figueroa, she found her crying alone in her room. De Vargas was concerned and inquired. She found that the young woman could "not resist his passion. I [de Vargas] knew that he had taken carnal access with her. For the rest of the night all she did was cry until the morning. I then returned to the convent."³⁸¹

Again, women's ability to resist Bello's advances is revealed to have been limited. This young woman described that she could not stop him from doing what he wanted, and de Vargas made the immediate mental leap to her own experience with Bello, as the girl did not directly tell her what had happened. In addition to establishing Bello's pattern of misdeeds, this quote also demonstrates a moment in which de Vargas functioned as a nurturing, caring spiritual mother.

In caring for the clearly traumatized young woman, de Vargas functioned as a spiritual mother, counseling, comforting, and protecting the woman until the morning as she was distraught over what had been done to her body and soul. De Vargas did what was expected of mothers, caring and praying for the wounded young woman. This experience would springboard de Vargas into her role as a guardian spiritual mother. For what she did next was investigate how many other women Fray Bello had thus afflicted with his attentions.

³⁸¹ Ibid., "Audiencia tercera," June 5, 1720, image 444: "Así llorando sobre la cama y preguntándole por qué lloraba, la respondió que había nacido en signo fatal y que no podía refrenar su pasión. Que había tenido acceso carnal con ella y esta confesante lo conoció por sí y que después lo restante la noche de todo fue llorar hasta la mañana que se fue al convento."

In April 1719 de Vargas began asking the women with whom Fray Bello interacted about his behaviors in order to discover the extent of his solicitations; this would lead to her making one of the more pivotal decisions in her life. De Vargas described how she began revisiting the homes she had stayed in and speaking specifically to the women about what Fray Bello had done to her and to them. She discovered that not only the de Figueroas had been affected, but also the Espinos (their daughter) and the servants of two other households, including a slave who had been impregnated.³⁸² Fray Bello had originally called on all of these women to hear their confessions and to pray with them but had ultimately solicited and had sex with them. De Vargas, from what she was able to discover, knew in April 1719 that Fray Bello had failed her and all the daughters of confession that were under his care, numbering at least five, including de Vargas, and perhaps more.

De Vargas followed these discoveries with some radical alterations in her lifestyle. She broke off all communication with Fray Bello, divorcing herself from the life she had known since 1706. She began to confess with Fray José Sánchez, to whom she confessed the extent of the crimes she had witnessed.³⁸³ He told her she “no tenía obligación de confesar estos pecados al Santo Oficio” (did not have an obligation to confess this to the Holy Office).³⁸⁴ Fray Sánchez went on to say that he had no obligation to discover what had happened to her or her “hermanas” (sisters) and fellow “hijas de confesión.”³⁸⁵ Moreover, owing to the nature of the sins she had committed, she was to continue with the acts of penitence that Fray Bello had prescribed “para encarcelar su demonio” (to imprison the demon).³⁸⁶ De Vargas appeared assuaged by these

³⁸² *Ibid.*, “Audiencia tercera,” June 5, 1720, images 455–446.

³⁸³ *Ibid.*, image 446.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, image 447.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, image 446.

actions but still went forward with caring for those women she had called “hermanas” (sisters) and Fray Bello’s “hijas de confesión.” De Vargas does not describe in detail what this care entailed other than to say that she told them that “no deban confesar con Fray Ignacio” (they should not confess with Father Ignacio).³⁸⁷ De Vargas’s spiritual and life lessons for them centered on removing themselves from his influence, which was swiftly aided by the nuns of the convent and the Holy Office.

In July 1719 the Inquisition arrested Father Bello on charges of solicitation and fornication, having been denounced by the nuns of the convent on Calle de San Francisco. The trial that followed cast an unusual pall on the story that de Vargas had played out in the discourse of her life. The Poor Clares and the family members of Don Simón Espino testified before the Inquisition that Fray Bello had solicited sexual favors from his female penitents, both within and outside the convent. The large number of witnesses from the community and the convent, in discussing Fray Bello’s misdeeds and fornications, frequently connected the name of de Vargas to Fray Bello as his “hija de confesión,” stating that she was either complicit in or perhaps a victim of these actions. He was eventually convicted and sentenced as the evidence of his guilt appeared overwhelming. Opinions on her role as a victim or perpetrator of solicitation varied, but most witnesses seemed to believe that she was a willing partner, claiming their relationship to be “trato ilícito” (illicit pact) to gain fame and fortune as a spiritual conduit in this world.³⁸⁸

Almost a year later, as de Vargas continued to live her life of outward piety, in June 1720 the Inquisition arrested her on accusations of *visiones falsas, embustera, hipócrita, simulada*

³⁸⁷ Ibid., images 445–447.

³⁸⁸ Proceso de fe de Fray Ignacio Rodríguez Bello, Calificador of the Inquisition, “Hechos y Dichos,” December, 1719. This comes directly from the trial of Fray Bello for solicitation and does not appear in the *proceso de fe* of Catalina de Vargas.

virtud (false visions, deception, hypocrisy, simulated virtue).³⁸⁹ The community in general had already spoken of the pair's misdeeds and their either positive or negative impressions of both Fray Bello and de Vargas during the trial of the former. They were called back throughout de Vargas's trial, beginning in December 1719 and continuing until November or December 1720, to confirm and ratify their testimonies from the trial against Fray Bello as relevant and accurate descriptions of de Vargas. Sometimes they added more evidence specifically targeting de Vargas, and sometimes they did not. Only a very few were called directly to testify in de Vargas's case alone, and then mostly for points of clarification on where and when the events of de Vargas's life occurred.³⁹⁰

Throughout the month of June 1720, de Vargas was asked questions and asked to respond to the accusations of the fiscal as they were read to her in court. She reported little beyond the story already provided but with one clear exception. She insisted that her virtue was intact, "nunca le faltara de servir a Dios" (never faltered in serving God).³⁹¹ She insisted that she had never faked her visions, raptures, possession, or desire to be a virtuous and good Christian woman. She insisted that by her testimony and the testimony of others, Fray Bello "took carnal access without the women's consent" on multiple occasions.³⁹² She made it clear that no matter what Bello had done, she was a force for good.³⁹³ He was to blame, and she was as much a victim as any of the other women she or others had mentioned. What was on trial, then, was how

³⁸⁹ Proceso de fe de Catalina de Vargas: "Conclusión de Hechos y Dichos de los Calificadores de la Inquisición," June 1, 1720, images 405–429.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, "Audiencia tercera," June 5, 1720, image 447.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*

³⁹² *Ibid.*: "tuvo acceso carnal sin su voluntad."

³⁹³ Proceso de fe de Catalina de Vargas, image 482. Following the official accusation by the *fiscal* in the court in which she was read the charges against her, she constantly asserted that she was not a liar, that what she said about her life, visions, and raptures was true.

the community saw de Vargas, how de Vargas saw herself, and whether the Holy Office believed she really could be a virtuous and good Christian woman while having had sex.

The list of testimonies against her was presented to de Vargas on July 11, 1721. De Vargas was then appointed an Inquisition lawyer and began constructing a list of her own witnesses and enemies (*tacha*) for her defense. Meetings with the lawyer and the testimony of the individuals called to attest to the virtue and status of de Vargas occurred from November 1721 to October 1722. All told, 107 people (excluding de Vargas and members of the Inquisition) bore witness and testimony to the debate over the relative virtue and merits of de Vargas's life and actions. De Vargas only said that three of them were her true enemies, as was the purpose of the *tacha* (list of enemies): Inés de San Narciso, Doña Maria de la Antigua Santa Fe, and "another nun called Crista."³⁹⁴ Granted, these women were known enemies, and the disregarding of their testimony may have helped to remove some of the more damning evidence, but de Vargas had admitted to having sex while outwardly presenting herself as virtuous; even if she believed herself to be virtuous, the Inquisition disagreed.

Finally, on February 5, 1723, the inquisitors and the representative of the bishop of Las Palmas met, conferred, and determined that de Vargas was indeed guilty of the heresies of hypocrisy, simulation of virtue, and deception (*hipócrita, simulada virtud, embustera*). Her punishment was banishment from Las Palmas in perpetuity, from the Canaries for five years, and from the city of Madrid for one year. She would not be permitted to confess nor take the Eucharist, except on the Easter of each year she spent in exile.³⁹⁵ There are no further mentions

³⁹⁴ Ibid., Defense lawyer, "Conclusión de Defensas," October 27, 1722, images 908–909.

³⁹⁵ Ibid., "Los Señores Inquisidores de la Inquisición con la autoridad del Obispo de Las Palmas," February 5, 1723, images 958–959.

of her in the trial records of the Inquisition, and it is not clear where she went on the order of the Inquisitors and whether she continued her religious career once there.

Conclusion:

The case of de Vargas highlights two essential aspects of spiritual motherhood better than almost any other: the spiritual mother's relationship with her confessor/spiritual guide, and the deep importance of sexual purity in both personal and public discourse on spiritual authority. While these factors were important to all spiritual figures in early modern Catholicism and, as Bilinkoff has demonstrated in *Related Lives*, to women in particular, de Vargas's case brought them to the fore.³⁹⁶ The complex personal, institutional, and communal understandings of the appropriate conduct of a spiritual mother are wrapped around this case in ways that make it clear where and when de Vargas behaved as a spiritual mother and when she did not.

The more complicated issues come from the deep personal relationship with Fray Bello and the way Bello and de Vargas, and their community, understood that relationship. As Bilinkoff established, the forging of the bond between penitent and confessor was an essential component of early modern spiritual authority.³⁹⁷ That is reflected strongly in de Vargas's life: from the beginning of her career as a spiritual mother, she attached her spiritual and social well-being to Fray Bello. Their own understanding of their relationship was clearly established in her obedience and his leadership. De Vargas submitted to his rules, commandments, and guidance and made whatever moves in the community he saw fit for her to make. To de Vargas, Bello was her "padre espiritual" (spiritual father). To Bello, de Vargas was a *santa* (saint), and he touted

³⁹⁶ Bilinkoff, *Related*, introduction.

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, introduction and conclusion.

her as such. And because he was an established spiritual figure in the community when he began promoting her as such, their relationship become a topic of public discourse.

Bello's reputation lent de Vargas's words, actions, and beliefs great weight among those who trusted and believed Bello. And as de Vargas's network and influence grew, so did Bello's reputation, creating a reciprocal building force. However, there were those who did not trust de Vargas's visions and piety to be real, instead considering them some mistake of nature or a product of her own vainglory. This diminished Bello's reputation, and her own in response. Some called Bello and de Vargas *santo* or *santa* (holy) respectively, whereas, conversely, others stated that Bello was a sexual deviant and de Vargas an *embustera* (deceiver) and that she "tenía vanagloria" (had vainglory). As they made themselves into a public pair, their relationship became public and either granted status to de Vargas as a spiritual mother or detracted from that status. Regardless, that relationship was the foundation on which de Vargas built her reputation. Sexuality only complicated the matter.

Sexuality was and is an essential component of establishing one's religious credentials, but particularly among women. Historians have established that women were considered to be more carnal, closer to things temporal, and, as the bearers of children, necessarily more attached to the body, as opposed to the more spiritual men. Indeed, as many historians have demonstrated, almost any act or suspicion of sexual impurity was enough to end a spiritual career be it a man's or woman's, at least until it had been thoroughly investigated. And the Inquisition in de Vargas's case reinforces this conclusion.³⁹⁸ However, de Vargas and Bello's understanding of their

³⁹⁸ Perry, *Gender and Disorder in Early Modern Seville*. Wiesner-Hanks, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, introduction. Jantzen, *Power, Gender, and Christian Mysticism*, introduction. Lisa Vollendorf, *The Lives of Women: A New History of Inquisitional Spain*

sexuality complicates the concept of spiritual motherhood in *Related Lives*, which emphasizes an intellectual and spiritual intimacy, but not sexual. Close, chaste relationships between men and women, did not translate easily to the laity.³⁹⁹

De Vargas and Bello believed that their sexuality was a logical extension of their relationship (as long as it was between them) and did not impede their own purity. Bello and the confessor who followed him both told de Vargas that she had been forgiven for her sexual transgressions, and that it was not a matter for the Inquisition to investigate. And, as de Vargas insisted even after admitting her sexual transgressions to the Inquisition, she never stopped serving God and remained pure of intent and spirit. Bilinkoff analyzed the relationships of the more educated nuns and priests of the religious orders and convents, but in de Vargas's case and in lay spiritual motherhood, sexuality was a more complicated question. The community itself was divided, shocked, and *escandalizado* (scandalized), but de Vargas remained a spiritual figure for almost five years throughout the scandal, as those who believed in her continued to do so. De Vargas demonstrated that for spiritual mothers, sex was not necessarily a personally or communally forbidden aspect of that role, though the Inquisition disagreed.

De Vargas's case demonstrates not only that a spiritual mother's relationship to her spiritual guide/confessor held great importance but that sexuality was a more fluid component of building spiritual authority. All the spiritual mothers analyzed herein relied on a strong relationship with their confessors, spiritual guides, and local religious institutions. De Vargas just shows how important that relationship could be, for she built her entire career on it, whereas the others had some other recourse. All the spiritual mothers analyzed herein had sex. Several had

(Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2005), introduction. Sluhovksy, *Believe not Every Spirit*, introduction.

³⁹⁹ Bilinkoff, *Related Lives*, introduction.

children, were married, and lived as a wife and mother. For each of them, sex and sexuality were issues that they had to address in establishing themselves, and for most of them it was less of an issue than it was for de Vargas. Sex, and Fray Bello's surrender to sexual temptation/misconduct, ended de Vargas's career. Yet her case, the most egregious example of sexual misconduct, still highlights just how acceptable a certain level of sex/sexuality was in the personal and communal understanding of spiritual motherhood, even within the "related lives" of penitent and confessor.

Conclusion

Spiritual motherhood was a consistent and effective means for women to enter public leadership roles as educators, advisers, and experts in spirituality through adherence to gender roles that would theoretically have prevented them from holding such prominent positions in society. These laywomen lived and operated throughout the early modern Spanish Empire. They worked to fulfill the gender roles and community and religious expectations regarding what made a woman “good” and, either by intent or by outside influence, became important public figures within their communities. For those analyzed here, that was a humble and faithful adherence to Catholicism, community, and family. In so doing, these women used the very systems designed to limit their influence to gain a great deal of it during and after their lifetimes.

Historians of gender and gender politics have long argued that accepted societal roles permitted women to perform and function in society. These arguments have included large-scale discussions by scholars like Judith Butler who have argued over the very definition of woman in the modern world.⁴⁰⁰ Historians Mónica Díaz and Stacey Schlau have discussed, generally and specifically, how women behaved, lived, and were described in terms of the Spanish Catholic culture in the early modern period, and specifically within the Spanish Empire. Authors like Mary Elizabeth Perry have argued that these limits were often hard to define in Spanish society and that these ambiguities allowed women to misbehave or subvert the prescribed limitations. This dissertation offers an analysis of how spiritual motherhood enhanced the ways in which women could accomplish this through adherence to spiritual and familial virtue.⁴⁰¹

⁴⁰⁰ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, introduction.

⁴⁰¹ Díaz, *Indigenous Writings from The Convent*. Díaz, *To Be Indio in Colonial Spanish America*. Schlau, *Spanish American Women's Use of the Word*. Schlau, *Gendered Crime and Punishment*.

Luisa Melgarejo de Soto in Lima, Peru, demonstrated how spiritual motherhood was rooted in what Catholic communities determined was feminine and female and what responsibilities and behaviors were expected of those who were female. Words like *santa*, *virtuosa*, *buena cristiana*, *buena sierva de Dios*, and *obediente* (holy, virtuous, good Christian woman, good servant of God, obedient) took on tremendous importance in describing what a good Catholic woman was like and how she behaved, coming to form a collective understanding of the good woman. Melgarejo fulfilled these roles with the group that surrounded her and Rosa of Lima by showing obedience and faith throughout her lifetime. Through that behavior she fulfilled what was expected and became a far more influential woman than if she was merely the wife of Juan de Soto, an *abogado* in Lima. Thus, her case represents the foundational requirements for building a career as a spiritual mother. In acquiring a general reputation of being a good woman, spiritual mothers gained the necessary basis to enter larger roles of leadership with greater reach and influence.

The power that spiritual mothers could wield was grounded in the social mores and expectations of the communities in which they lived and operated. The community determined the appearance and potency of spiritual authority, particularly for laywomen and nuns, through what they defined as socially acceptable dress, spirituality, rhetoric, belief, and so on. Some of the more effective potentials and limitations of communal power become apparent when one studies groups of religious working in concert. Specifically, Elizabeth Leffeldt in *Religious Women in Golden Age Spain* and Mónica Díaz in *Indigenous Writings from the Convent* have provided examples of how nuns and members of religious orders worked together to exert influence and authority over their communities. These authors have demonstrated how convents and female religious orders were essential components of their towns and cities, and this gave

them greater power in leveraging their interests. These organizations of women provided financial, cultural, and religious support for entire groups and nations, and thus the community worked to meet their needs and to avoid their displeasure in the various negotiations of power that occurred within the towns and cities where they were located. Yet those communities pushed back against the power of these women religious with their own interpretations of the place and power of those convents and the women in them and their own opinions of the behaviors they should exhibit. Thus, while these women had great power, it was set within the limitations and expectations of their communities. This was no less true of spiritual mothers who sought to establish, negotiate, and leverage their status within a community.⁴⁰²

Catalina Ballester of Mallorca showed how the trappings and expectations of the community changed spiritual motherhood's functioning and appearance. While in the more rural Falaniche she was expected to dress and act in a humble manner, working and serving the community and supporting her family, poor, humble, and outwardly pious, she gained a large amount of respect as a healer and font of spiritual knowledge about those who had died. In Palma, in contrast, she interacted primarily with priests and those of middle and merchant ranks, rode in carriages, wore fine clothing, and focused her efforts less on healing and more on charity. Her life in these different places shows how those communities molded and shaped what spiritual motherhood meant. Yet under it all were the ongoing expectations of feminine and faithful behavior, which allowed these women to gain status, reputation, and power through meeting them. However, it was the communal expectations of purity and largesse in a spiritual mother that Ballester ultimately failed to fulfill. Her excessive interest in material wealth and the

⁴⁰² Lehfeltdt, *Religious Women in Golden Age Spain*. Díaz, *Indigenous Writings from the Convent*. Weber, *Teresa of Ávila and the Rhetoric of Femininity*. Weber, *Approaches to Teaching Teresa of Ávila and the Spanish Mystics*.

rumors that she had had sexual relations with priests, and especially her last spiritual guide, Pedro de Fuenbuena, formed the reasons why the Inquisition tried and punished her. Thus, while spiritual motherhood functioned differently in these two communities, and in other places throughout the empire, its fundamental core remained the same, demonstrating a broader rule set that applied to spiritual motherhood while also showing its adaptability.

Spiritual motherhood was an effective vehicle for social and racial advancement in the Spanish Empire. Just like service in the militias, monasteries, and convents, spiritual motherhood could help someone “whiten” themselves under the laws of Spain during the early modern period. For race was fluid. Race itself as a concept was continually evolving and changing under the Spanish legal system, which allowed one to modify one’s racial identity and status. While it was dependent on who one’s parents were, the system had many more categories than the systems employed in the British American colonies and only grew more complicated as intermixing continued over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries throughout the empire, but especially in the more racially diverse Americas.⁴⁰³

María Jacinta Montoya and Nicolás Ayllón were an especially good example of how efforts to adhere more closely to the traditions of the Catholic religious orders and spiritual motherhood could change a person’s racial and legal standing, at least to a degree. The broader community, especially the native population, believed in and supported the efforts of Montoya and Ayllón in their *recogimiento* as it helped the young *indias* of Lima gain access to shelter, education, and edification, which could only serve to improve their lives and their status under the Spanish legal system. Yet, at the same time, their efforts demonstrated the limitations of how far one could “whiten” oneself. For as scholars have argued, the archbishop and the Inquisition

⁴⁰³ O’Toole, *Bound Lives*. Schwaller, *Géneros de Gente in Early Colonial Mexico*.

investigated Montoya specifically because she was a mestiza in order to prevent Ayllón's ascendancy to sainthood, which they wished to avoid because he was an *indio*.⁴⁰⁴ While this demonstrates an unwillingness to whiten Ayllón, Montoya came out of the experience more or less unscathed, demonstrating that she had succeeded in following the path of spiritual motherhood and reaching an unusually revered position for one of her racial heritage as a savior of Lima's youth.

Both Catalina Ballester and Catalina de Vargas were of poorer backgrounds and relied more heavily on the reputations of their male patrons than did the more elite Melgarejo and Montoya, but none more so than de Vargas of the Canaries. Her relationship with her confessor, Father Ignacio Rodriguez Bello, shaped her entire career as a spiritual mother. He helped her ascend from a destitute background through his carefully garnered reputation as a spiritual leader, confessor, adviser, and exorcist. His position, prestige, and obvious attachment to de Vargas allowed her to establish herself in one of the most accepted relationships within spiritual motherhood: male church oversight. Scholars have made it clear that any woman who wanted to establish herself as pious had to find a man of the cloth who was trustworthy and faithful. Until the end of their relationship, Bello appeared to be just that as he forged de Vargas into a spiritual mother in Las Palmas through her work with the young women of her community. This emphasizes the effectiveness and importance of this kind of relationship for spiritual mothers, especially those with no wealth or other status to help boost them into leadership roles. At the same time, de Vargas's experience showed how total reliance on a male religious authority could be a fickle and unstable foundation for a woman's own career and reputation.⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰⁴ Van Deusen, "'In so celestial a language,'" pp. 69–74.

⁴⁰⁵ Bilinkoff, *Related Lives*. Haliczzer, *Between Exaltation and Infamy*.

Bello failed to hold to the expected norms of sexual purity for the clergy and brought de Vargas down with him. A serial solicitor of sexual favors and, arguably, a rapist, Bello was investigated and condemned by the Inquisition of Mallorca, and as a result, de Vargas was also indicted, and her status as a spiritual mother shattered, when it was revealed that Bello had had sex with her, even though she claimed it was forced. Thus, Jodi Bilinkoff and Stephen Haliczer are vindicated in their arguments that this relationship was crucial for any woman seeking status as a devout Catholic. Their arguments focused on women who held greater status as members of religious orders, but the same expectations of gendered behavior and faith affected the lay spiritual mothers who operated throughout the early modern Spanish Empire. De Vargas's life also highlights that women had an equal share in any sexual misconduct, even if the sex was forced, as de Vargas claimed. When sexual impurity and transgression became involved, her status as a poor laywoman with no church patron sheltering her left her in a vulnerable position; the Inquisition's sentence ended her role as a spiritual mother as well as removing the status that had supported her material needs for years.

What then was spiritual motherhood? It was a multifaceted road to advancement for women throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and into the eighteenth century. What form that advancement took, and what the women's goals and efforts (financial, spiritual, racial, social) were, depended on them and their communities. What it looked like and how it functioned changed over time and across places, but the underlying potential of making use of society's expectations of women and motherhood was consistent. However, spiritual motherhood was certainly a system founded on the concepts of faith and femininity; the woman's spirit was to be close to God, humble, and informative and educational; she was to be obedient, caring, and willing to change her lifestyle and appearance to better serve the community, whatever that

might mean. Spiritual motherhood was a product of the late medieval period in which women founded their authority in Catholicism based on certain behaviors of humility and asceticism.⁴⁰⁶ The laywomen of early modern Spain developed and reshaped it in the post-Tridentine Catholic Church.

Spiritual motherhood faced a crisis in the fifteenth century, which, nevertheless, did not reduce its potency in the early modern period. From Teresa of Ávila and Rosa of Lima to Montoya and de Vargas, women were still able to access status as publicly read, discussed, and consulted spiritual authorities through their adaptations following Trent. Rather than being a hindrance, a closer association with obedience, humility, and status as a good woman and mother to her fellow Catholics allowed women to learn theology, read, write, and publish and become educators, advisers, and healers. Many of these women lived and operated as revered members of their communities throughout the Spanish Empire before and during the early modern period.

Spiritual motherhood was a fluid system that represents only one of the roads available for early modern women to alter their social standing. This study has focused on the laity as they are an underrepresented and difficult-to-access subsection of the people of the Spanish Empire in the early modern period. Yet these remain the largest and clearest examples within that subset, with existing secondary literature around them (with the exception of de Vargas). In future, a broader sampling of the laywomen who avoided Inquisition trials detailing their lives and their communities would offer a broader understanding of those engaged in aspects of spiritual motherhood at various levels of accomplishment.

⁴⁰⁶ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

Further, this study has focused on the Spanish Empire, and future endeavors would benefit from a more cross-cultural analysis of women throughout various self-professed Catholic societies in early modern Europe. An examination of the gender and social expectations of women in France and Italy could provide greater insight into how cross-pollination among the various Catholic powers influenced the development of spiritual motherhood throughout the early modern period, and indeed whether such influences did exist despite cultural borders. Such a study would naturally be limited in that many of the sources for the laity in Spain are accessible only in the courts of the Catholic Church and the Inquisition, but the potential exists to analyze more and similar documents, both in other parts of the Spanish Empire (Mexico, Naples, the Basque Country, Galicia, etc.) and outside of it. While it would be possible to compare the concept of spiritual motherhood in Catholic and Protestant regions, it would be another project (in the opinion of this author) and would require a more extensive volume. Nevertheless, the concept of the pure woman who is mother to all existed in Protestant countries, as Elizabeth I of England demonstrated. Spiritual motherhood crossed regions and borders within the Spanish Empire throughout the early modern period, and potentially crossed Catholic-Protestant denominational borders as well.

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